



THE LIBERTY "76" BOYS OF '76

A Weekly Magazine containing Stories of the American Revolution.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, February 4, 1901, by Frank Tousey.

No. 101.

NEW YORK, DECEMBER 5, 1902.

Price 5 Cents.

THE LIBERTY BOYS' DRAG-NET; OR, HAULING THE RED COATS IN.

By HARRY MOORE.



One after another the redcoats entered the alley, and as they did so they were seized by the "Liberty Boys," and bound and gagged.

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CHAPTER I.

WHIGS AND TORIES.

"You had better forsake the rebel cause, neighbor Farrell, and come over on the king's side."

"I could not think of doing it, Sam."

"You had better do it."

"No."

"Let me tell you something, Dave."

"Go ahead."

"You know that Arnold has charge of the British army at Petersburg?"

"Yes, I know it well—the cowardly traitor that he is!"

"Well, I happen to know, Dave, that Arnold has the names of all the rebels in this part of the country, and that he is getting ready to make a raid and capture or kill all such rebels, and burn their homes and destroy their property."

"You have knowledge that he intends to do this?"

"Yes. I tell you, Dave, because we have been lifelong friends, and because—well, you know, on account of Lucy and Tom."

"I know. And how soon, Sam, is this raid to be made?"

"I don't know, exactly, but will not be surprised to see Arnold's men coming at any moment."

"How did Arnold learn the names of the Whigs of this part of the country, Sam?"

As David Farrell asked this question he looked keenly and searchingly in the eyes of his neighbor. The other colored the least bit, in spite of his efforts to appear cool and unconcerned. The truth of the matter was that he was a zealous Tory, and had himself furnished the names of the Whigs of this part of the country. He understood that his neighbor suspected this, too, and that was the reason he could not keep from looking slightly disconcerted and guilty. ?

"I don't know how he learned their names, Dave," replied Samuel Hopper, after a moment's hesitation, but his answer did not deceive the other.

"Sam," said Mr. Farrell, sternly, "do you know what I think of you?"

"No, what?" the speaker looked worried and ill at ease.

"I think you are a mighty poor specimen of humanity, that's what I think."

The other colored up.

"Why should you think that?"

"Because, you furnished Arnold with the names of the Whigs of this vicinity, that's why. You went to that cowardly traitor and gave him the names of all the patriots, and the majority of them are friends and neighbors, men you have known for years. Sam, to tell the truth, I am heartily ashamed of you."

The other flushed still more.

"I am a loyal king's man," he said, rather angrily, "and I have the right to aid the cause of the king, if I wish to do so."

"Even to the extent of causing your lifelong friends and neighbors to be killed or captured and their homes burned, eh?"

David Farrell's voice was cold and stern, and there was scorn in the tones as well.

"Well, they ought not to be rebels," was the defiant reply.

"And they on their part think that you ought not to be a king's man."

"That is folly."

"You think so?"

"Yes; it is a crime to be disloyal to the king."

"You may think that, Sam," was the calm reply. "But I and my patriot neighbors do not think so. We believe that the people of America should be free and independent, and we feel that we have as much right to think that way as you and your Tory neighbors have to think the other way."

"I can't see it in that light," with a shake of the head. "You are traitors to your king, and ought to be punished."

"We do not acknowledge King George as our king."

"But he is. It is folly to deny it."

"We deny that he is our king. We have no king; we say that we are and should be free and independent, and we are willing to fight, bleed, and, if need be, die to achieve our freedom."

Samuel Hopper frowned and shook his head.

"That is the talk of a traitor," he said. "I don't like to hear it."

"And I don't like to hear you say that I am a traitor, Sam," was the calm reply, "for I don't look upon myself as a traitor, at all. I owe nothing to your king. He has

never seen me, does not know me, and cares nothing for me. Why, then, should I pay over a large share of my earnings to him?"

"Because he is king, and has a right to the money."

"Bosh, Sam! He has no more right to demand a share of my money than you have."

"That may be the way you look at it, Dave, but it isn't the way I look at it."

"It is the way you should look at it."

"That is as may be."

"Well, we won't quarrel, Sam. I'm much obliged to you for telling me of the expected raid by Arnold's men."

"I did it because you and I are friends, Dave, and because my daughter Lucy and your son Tom are sweethearts."

"I understand, and I'm grateful to you for telling me, Sam."

"That is all right. I will say, Dave, that I did not give in your name to Arnold. It was not on my list, but Jim Snaggs handed in a list almost the same time that I did, and your name was on the list."

"Naturally it would be, for he is my deadly enemy, as you know, Sam."

"Yes; he hasn't forgotten how you handled him that time, when he called you a cowardly traitor."

"That's right; he hasn't forgotten or forgiven, for he is of a vengeful disposition, and will never rest easy until he has had revenge."

"I fear you are right about that."

"Yes, I know I am. Well, I must make such preparations as are possible for the coming of Arnold's men."

"Yes, get things in shape as soon as possible, Dave; when they come I will do all I can for you, and will keep them from burning your house if I can."

"Much obliged, Sam."

The above-given conversation took place between two men who had met in the road, where it wound through the timber at a point perhaps two miles south of the James River, in Virginia. The time was the middle of April, of the year 1781. The Revolutionary War was in progress, and Arnold, the traitor, who was in charge of the British force in this part of Virginia, was making it as uncomfortable for patriots as he possibly could. His men were burning and pillaging houses everywhere, and in many instances they murdered the patriots.

Farrell and Hopper were near neighbors, their farms adjoining, and while Farrell was a patriot, Hopper was a strong Tory; but the two had remained friendly, in spite of this, mainly because of the fact that Hopper's daughter, Lucy, and Mr. Farrell's son, Tom, were sweethearts. Tom was away, in the ranks of Marion's brave followers, however, at this time of which we write.

When the two men had finished their conversation they parted, each going toward his home.

Scarcely had they disappeared around bends in the road, when a man stepped out from behind a clump of bushes standing within twenty feet of where the two men had been

while talking, and he shook his fist in the direction taken by David Farrell; and hissed out:

"I'll be even with you, Dave Farrell. I'll get even with you or know the reason why. Jim Snaggs is not the man to let himself be pounded around as if he was a bag of sawdust and not get even with the man who done the pounding. I'll get even with you."

Then he turned and shook his fist in the direction taken by Hopper.

"An' as for you, Sam Hopper, I'm mighty glad thet I foun' out that ye are shieldin' Dave Farrell. I'll tell the British soldiers when they come, an' I don't think ye'll be able to keep 'em from burnin' the rebel's house, as you said you would do. I guess ye'll find thet Jim Snaggs has somethin' to say about how things go in this part of the country!"

"Oh, you think so, do you, Jim Snaggs?" remarked a cool, calm voice, and Snaggs whirled, to find himself confronted by a handsome young fellow of perhaps twenty years of age. The young man had stepped out from behind a clump of bushes on the other side of the road from that on which Snaggs had been concealed.

"Tom Farrell," gasped Snaggs, starting back.

"Yes, Tom Farrell," calmly.

"Where did ye come frum?"

"From behind the bushes, here, the same as you did."

"How long have you been there?"

"As long as you were in your position, I judge."

"An' ye heard what—what——"

"I heard the conversation between Mr. Hopper and my father, yes; and I also heard all that you said."

"Oh, ye did, hey?"

"Yes, I heard you threaten how you would get even with my father, and all about it."

"Ye did?"

"Yes; and I am here to tell you that if you harm one hair of my father's head it won't be good for you."

The young man looked at the other so fiercely as to cause the man to shrink back perceptibly. But only for a moment. He quickly braced up, put on an air of bravado, and growled out:

"I'm not afraid of ye, Tom Farrell."

"That may be. I don't care whether you are or not; but I will tell you this, that you will be sorry for it if you do anything to injure my father."

Snaggs glanced around him, as if expecting to see somebody.

"Where's the rest of yer gang?" he asked.

"I do not belong to any 'gang,' as you call it, Jim Snaggs."

"Ye know what I mean. Ye are a member of Marion's gang of rough riders, hain't ye?"

"I am proud to say that I am a member of Marion's force; but I deny that we are a 'gang.'"

"It don't matter what ye call yerselves. Are any of 'em here with ye?"

"That is none of your business, Jim Snaggs," was the

prompt reply. "Do you think I would tell you anything? Why, you are one of the most sneaking Tories there are in this vicinity, and I wouldn't trust you with any information."

"Oh, ye wouldn't hey?"

"No; you would break your neck, almost, trying to get to the traitor, Arnold, with the information."

"Mebby I would, an' mebbly I wouldn't," in a growling voice.

"I don't think there is any doubt regarding the matter, Mr. Snaggs. I learned from listening to the conversation between Mr. Hopper and my father that you have been to Arnold with information regarding your neighbors who are patriots."

"So was Sam Hopper there with information, the same as I was—only he didn't give in yer father's name, an' I did. That is the only difference, but I s'pose ye think et wuz all right fur him, and wrong fur me."

A frown came over the young patriot's face.

"No, I don't think it was right for him to act the part of a sneak and traitor to his neighbors and lifelong friends; because he did not hand in my father's name makes no difference in my opinion of him."

"Of course, ye'd say that!" sneeringly.

"I meant it, too."

"I don' believe et."

"Oh, you don't?" the young man's eyes flashed.

"No, I don't; et don't stand to reason."

"Why not?"

"Because ye and his daughter Lucy are sweethearts, as everybody knows, an' it would make ye feel that ye could overlook what her father does."

The patriot youth shook his head.

"No, it doesn't make a bit of difference in my feelings toward Mr. Hopper."

But Snaggs could not understand this, and it was evident he did not believe the statement for he shook his head.

"Thet'll do to tell," he said, "but it won't do to believe. Ye won't hev anythin' against him, because he is the father of your sweetheart and because he didn't hand in yer father's name ter Arnold, but ye think my handin' in the names of the rebels is a terrible piece of business."

"I think it a very poor piece of business for both of you," said Tom, decidedly. "I don't see how you could have the heart to hand in the names of people who have lived neighbors to you for years, and many of whom have done you lots of favors."

"Oh, well, they oughtn't to be rebels and traitors to the king," said Snaggs, doggedly. "Ef they will be rebels, they must take the consequences."

"Yes, and you have acted the parts of sneaks in going to the British and betraying your neighbors, and will have to take the consequences of such actions, too," said Tom, grimly.

"What will the consequences be?" in a sneering voice.

"You will find out in due time."

"Yes, an' so will ye fin, out, Tom Farrell!" cried a shrill, triumphant voice, and a rough looking man of perhaps twenty years darted out from behind some bushes behind the two and leaped upon Tom's back.

CHAPTER II.

AN UNEQUAL COMBAT

Tom Farrell was taken by surprise, and consequently at a great disadvantage, but he was not the youth to give up tamely on that account.

He was naturally a brave, spirited youth, and his training while in the ranks of General Marion's force of fighters had been of a character to still further imbue him with the fighting instinct. The result was that he whirled and twisting in the grasp of his assailant, managed to get face to face with him, and secured a very good hold, considering the disadvantages he had been laboring under.

Finding that his intended victim was not disposed to submit tamely, the newcomer began using all his strength in an endeavor to throw the other.

"So that's your game, is it, Ben Snaggs!" said Tom, grimly.

"Yes, it is and I am goin' ter make et win, too," half growled Ben Snaggs—for the newcomer was indeed the son of the man with whom Tom had been in conversation.

"You are, eh?" remarked Tom, sarcastically.

"Yes, I am!" fiercely; and then the two struggled to secure an advantage over each other.

Ben had the advantage of having the best hold, but this was counteracted by the fact that Tom was stronger and more athletic, as well as much quicker in his movements than his opponent. As a result the combat was a pretty even affair.

It did not take long for Tom to demonstrate his superiority, however, and by a herculean effort, he managed presently to get a better hold, and one which would enable him to take the offensive.

"I have you now, Ben, my boy!" said Tom, with grim satisfaction. "I will soon show you a trick you never heard of before."

"Mebby ye will, an' mebbly ye won't," panted Ben, his face dark with rage.

"There is no mebbly about it, Ben; I have got the better of you, and I'll prove it—there, how do you like that?"

Of a sudden Tom had caught Ben on his hip, and had lifted him clear off the ground and turning him clear over, threw him to the ground with a crash, falling on him heavily.

With such force did the young Tory strike the ground that practically all of the wind was knocked out of his body, and all he could do was to lie there and gasp for breath.

"Well, what do you think about it, now?" asked Tom, with a smile. "I told you how it would end, didn't I?"

"Confound ye!" hissed Ben, with the first breath he got; "I'll fix ye fer that! Dad, are you goin' to stan' up here and see this blamed rebel smash the breath all out of me? Knock his head off!"

"Oho, that's your game, is it?" cried Tom. "So I will have to look out for both of you, will I?"

Jim Snaggs had stood there, motionless, watching the progress of the struggle between his son and Tom Farrell, and he had not moved when he saw his hopeful go down with a crash, but now, when he heard him speak, his words aroused him to action.

Stooping, he picked up a club which lay on the road and taking a step forward, he struck at Tom viciously.

Had the club hit Tom on the head, as the wielder evidently intended it should, the patriot youth would have been knocked senseless, but he ducked his head and the club swung harmlessly over.

Instantly the patriot youth bounded to his feet and leaped toward the Tory.

The man was surprised by this prompt action, and was startled as well, but he struck a quick blow as the youth came toward him. Had he had a few seconds to spare, he would have been able to do considerable damage, but the youth was upon him so quickly that he could not swing the club more than a foot or so, and the blow lacked force. Then, too, Tom threw up his arm, and the club struck him on the forearm instead of the head, and he was not injured any to speak of.

Crack!

Tom's fist had shot out, and it struck the man on the jaw, knocking him down with a thump.

Before Tom could whirl around to face Ben Snaggs, however, that youth was upon him, and had struck him down.

Tom was tough and hardy, however, and was not materially damaged by the blow. He rolled over and over, making several revolutions, and then having got out of Ben's reach, leaped to his feet.

"I think I'll just get square with you for that blow, Ben, my boy!" he said, grimly, and with the words, he rushed at the Tory youth.

Ben, who was not the bravest youth in the world, tried to get out of the way by dodging to one side. He was not to escape, however, for Tom paused, half-turned, and dealt his enemy a blow on the jaw that knocked him down.

He had taken enough time in doing this, however, to permit of the youth's father getting to his feet, and Jim Snaggs seized the club, and dealt him a blow on the head, just as the patriot youth was turning to face him.

Tom saw the club in time to dodge but he did not escape it altogether; he was knocked down, but the blow had been glancing enough, so that he was not rendered unconscious.

He started to leap to his feet, but Ben Snaggs had scrambled up meantime and now leaped upon Tom's back, crushing him to the ground.

Then the Tory youth's father leaped forward, and drew back to strike Tom another blow with the club. He was greatly angered because the youth had struck him, and there is little doubt that he would have hit the young patriot a terrible blow with the club, had he been left to work his will.

This was not to be, however, for just as he was on the point of striking, a voice broke upon his hearing, causing him to stay his hand. The voice was grim and stern, and the words uttered were:

"Hold, you scoundrel! Don't you dare strike that youth with that club!"

A cry escaped the lips of the elder Snaggs, and with club still poised in the air, he turned his head and glared over his shoulder, while Ben also looked up, with a vicious expression on his face.

What the two saw was not calculated to reassure them. Seated on a magnificent horse a few yards distant, was a handsome, dashing looking young man of perhaps twenty-one years of age. He was bronzed as if from much exposure to the elements, but his keen gray eyes were clear and bright, and there was a glint in them which betokened the fact that their owner was a dangerous man to fool with. In his hands were two pistols, cocked and leveled, and it was the sight of these weapons that startled the two Tories, and caused them to cower.

It was an exciting and interesting tableau, and for a few moments not a member of the group moved or said a word; then, Tom Farrell suddenly took advantage of the situation, and with a sudden exertion of his strength, threw Ben Snaggs to one side and leaped to his feet.

"I am much obliged to you, sir," he said, addressing the stranger; "you've gotten me out of a pretty bad difficulty."

"They did seem to have you in a hole, that is a fact," was the quiet reply, with a smile; "but what is it all about, anyway, if you please?"

"These two," replied Tom, indicating the two, "are father and son, and they are a bad pair, to my way of thinking."

"Well, I never saw them before, and I know nothing about them, but I must say that, judging by what I have seen, the two of them attacking you, and the man with a club, I should say that your judgment of them is about correct."

"Who are you?" snarled Jim Snaggs.

"I am one who always likes to see fair play, my friend," was the calm reply; "and now, who are you?"

"His name is Snaggs, Jim Snaggs," said Tom; "and this is his son, Ben."

Tom indicated the Tory youth, who had just scrambled to his feet where he had been thrown by Tom, and now glared angrily first at Tom and then at the stranger.

"I am glad to know the names of the two, and I must say that they look mean enough to be Tories."

This was said in a cool, matter-of-fact manner, just as if he was not saying anything out of the ordinary.

"They are Tories, sir!" cried Tom, eagerly; "and I judge by what you have just said, that you are a Patriot."

The stranger bowed and smiled again.

"You are right," he said; "I am a Patriot."

"Good!" cried Tom; "I'm glad to hear it."

But it was evident that Mr. Snaggs and his estimable son, Ben were not glad to hear that the newcomer was a patriot. They glared at him angrily, but fearfully as well. It was plain that while they hated him, they at the same time feared him.

"Let's go, dad," said Ben, his voice trembling perceptibly; "let's don't stand here and listen to them talk about us enny longer."

He made a motion as if to depart, but the stranger gave one of the pistols a shake, which caused the youth to give up the idea of going at once.

"Stand where you are!" the youth cried. "Don't be in such a hurry to go."

"Ye hain't got no right to keep us from goin'," growled Mr. Snaggs.

"But I have the might," giving the pistols a shake, "and that amounts to the same thing, as I think you will admit."

"What do ye want of us?"

"Nothing in particular, but I wish to let you know that I am master here, and that you cannot come and go at your pleasure."

"Oh, that's et, eh?"

"Yes; but, too, perhaps you may wish to have something to say to them?" the last part of the speech being directed toward Tom Farrell.

"Nothing in particular, sir, save to warn them that if they do my father any harm, they will have to answer for it."

"Your father lives in this vicinity?"

"Yes."

"And so do these Tories, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"And your father is a Patriot, of course?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll add a warning to yours." He shook his two pistols at the Tories, and continued: "If you two rascals harm this young man's father, I, too, will hold you responsible, and you will have to answer to me."

"Who are ye?" asked the elede Tory.

"You wish to know who I am?"

"Yes."

"All right; then you shall know. My name is Slater—Dick Slater."

CHAPTER III.

LANK LIGE.

Cries of amazement and consternation escaped the lips of the Tories, while an exclamation of surprise was given utterance by Tom Farrell also.

"Dick Slater!" exclaimed the two Tories in unison.

"Dick Slater!" cried Tom; but there was a different intonation to his voice. His tones were joyous, while there was alarm and discomfiture in the voices of Jim Snaggs and his son.

The young stranger, who was indeed the famous patriot scout and spy, nodded his head and smiled.

"At your service," he said quietly.

"Jove, I am glad to meet you, Dick Slater!" cried Tom, his eyes shining brightly with delight.

"Are you?" with a smile.

"Yes; I have heard much about you, and have always wished that I might some time meet you."

"Thanks, I am glad to know you, my boy."

"My name is Tom Farrell, and I am a member of General Marion's force of roughriders."

"Ah, indeed. I am glad to hear that."

"Yes; I have been with Marion for nearly a year."

"Then you know something about—hello! those cowardly scoundrels are off."

Taking advantage of the fact that the two youths were talking to each other, and not noticing them, the two Tories, father and son, suddenly made a quick leap and, plunging in among the trees at the roadside, ran as if Old Nick were after them.

Acting upon the impulse of the moment, Dick fired off both his pistols.

Crack! Crack! went the weapons, and immediately following the reports a wild yell of pain and terror commingled, went up.

"I guess I must have hit one of them," said Dick with a smile.

"I should judge so by the yell he gave utterance to."

"Let's go and see if I damaged him seriously."

As he spoke, Dick leaped to the ground, and then in the company of Tom he entered the timber, and made his way a short distance in the direction taken by the fleeing pair.

They saw nothing of the fugitives, and Tom said:

"I guess one of them was so frightened by the whirl of bullets that he yelled in fright."

"No, I hit one, for, see, here is blood on the ground," said Dick, pointing.

Tom, looked and nodded his head.

"You are right. You hit one of them," he agreed.

"But the bullet inflicted merely a flesh wound, undoubtedly, for it did not cause the victim to stop running."

"Likely you are right; though, if a man is badly frightened, he might run quite a distance before realizing that he was badly wounded."

"That is true; let's walk a little farther, and see if we can find the Tories."

The two made their way a hundred yards or so deeper into the timber, but saw nothing of the fugitives.

"I guess he wasn't badly wounded," said Tom presently.

"I think not, else he would have been forced to stop by the time he had got this far."

"Yes, indeed."

The two men made their way back to the road, but while they were yet a short distance away, they heard a noise as would be made by a horse in kicking and plunging around.

"Some one is trying to catch my horse!" said Dick in a low, eager voice, and he darted forward, quickly followed by Tom.

When they reached the road they saw a tall, roughly-dressed man trying to catch the horse. The man looked like a hunter of whom there were many in that part of the country at that time.

"Hello, there; what are you doing?" cried Dick.

The man uttered an exclamation, and turned and looked the youths over for a few minutes before replying.

"Hain't ye got eyes in yer head?" he then growled.

"Yes, we have eyes in our heads," was the cool reply.

"Then I sh'd think ye c'u'd see whut I'm doin' without axin' enny such fool questions."

"Oh, you think that, do you?" with a bland smile.

"Yes."

"Exactly. Well, it looked to me as if you were trying to catch the horse."

"Thet's jes' whut I wuz doin'."

"Why were you tryin' to catch him?"

The fellow grinned leeringly.

"Mebby I jes' wanted ter see how old he wuz, by lookin' at his teeth, young feller," was the reply.

"And maybe you wanted to get on his back and see whether or not he was a good saddle-horse, my friend?" suggested Dick.

"Waal," with another grin, "mebby I mought hev done sumthin' uv thet kin' afore I got through with ther affair."

"You could not have done it," said Dick.

"I couldn'?"

"No."

"W'y not?"

"Because, the horse is mine, and he won't let anyone mount him but me."

"Humph. He's er bit purtickler erbout sech things, is he?"

"Yes, and if I hadn't got here when I did the chances are that he would have kicked your head off."

"Oh, he's er kicker, is he?"

"Yes, when he is bothered by strangers."

"Waal, ef ever he kicked at me, he'd never kick at any other fellow, fur I'd hev put a bullet through 'im, moughty quick!"

"And that would have been the last time you would ever have done such a thing as that."

"W'y so?"

"Because I would have put a bullet through you, mighty quick."

The youth spoke very quietly, and in a most matter-of-fact voice, but it was evident that he meant what he said, and the stranger gave him a searching look.

"Oh, ye would hev done thet, would ye?" he remarked, in a drawling voice.

"Yes."

The horse, having heard and recognized Dick's voice, was now standing at a little distance, looking as quiet and docile as a work horse.

The rough-looking stranger eyed Dick and Tom keenly for a few moments, and then said:

"Who mought ye be, ennyhow, young feller?"

"Oh, I might be King George," said Dick calmly, "but I am not."

"Who is the fellow, do you know?" he asked of Tom, in a whisper.

"Never saw him before," was the whispered reply.

"My name is Lige Lankey," said the man, with a grin, as if he had heard what had been said, "but mos' people calls me Lank Lige."

"Ah, thanks," said Dick. "I am glad to know you. Now what do you want here?"

"Nothin' in purtickler, I guess."

"Then perhaps you had as well be getting away from here."

"Mebby so," with a grin. "Howsumever, I rayther guess thet this road is ez much mine ez et is your'n, hey?"

"Yes, that's true, but you were trying to steal my horse, and I don't like that, so the best thing you can do is to get away from here before I get angry."

"Oh, all right; but I mus' say thet ef ye don' want people ter try ter git yer hoss, ye ortenter leeve 'im standin' erlone in ther road—speshully in times sech ez these, when people don' seem ter keer much fur ther rights uv one another."

"That's all right; the horse is amply able to stand off anyone who tries to catch him."

"Ye give me anuther good chance at 'im, an' I'll show ye whether he is er not," with a leer.

"You couldn't catch him without shooting him."

"Thet's all right—Dick Slater."

As the fellow uttered the words, "Dick Slater," he suddenly darted in among the trees, and disappeared like a flash. The faint patter of his feet could be heard for a few moments, and then all was silence.

The two patriot youths looked at each other in silence for a few moments.

"What do you think of him?" asked Tom.

The other youth shook his head.

"I don't know what to think of him, Tom," was the reply. "I will just say, however, that to my mind he is, if an enemy, much more dangerous than both the Snaggs."

"You say 'if an enemy,' Dick. Do you have any doubts of his being an enemy?"

"I hardly know, Tom; it looked as if he was an enemy, and his actions would seem to lend color to that belief, but there was a peculiar light in his eyes that I could not fathom. He may not be an enemy."

Tom shook his head.

"I rather think he would have taken your horse and got out in a hurry if he had been able to do so," the youth said.

"Perhaps so," said Dick. "By the way, Tom, as it is growing late, I have half a mind to invite myself to stay overnight with you. How far is it to your home?"

"About a mile; and I shall be delighted to have you stay at our house, Dick. I haven't been home yet, and it will be a surprise when I walk in, but the folks will give you a hearty welcome, I know, when they learn who you are."

"All right. I'll go with you," and then Dick whistled to his horse, and the two walked down the road, the intelligent animal following like a dog.

Soon they came to a house standing beside the road.

"This is my home," said Tom, "and there is father in the barnlot, and mother is standing in the doorway; and, yes!—by jove, there is my sweetheart, Lucy Hopper!"

CHAPTER IV.

WARNING THE PATRIOTS.

"Ah, then you are in luck, Tom," smiled Dick. "You have got here just at the right time."

"So I have!" eagerly. Then Tom pointed to a gate leading into the barnlot, and said:

"Go on in there, and father will show you where to put your horse. You'll excuse me, I know, till I can go and greet mother and——"

"Lucy, eh?" with a smile. "Certainly. Go along, Tom. I'll get along all right."

The "Liberty Boy" made his way to the gate, passed through and approached Mr. Farrell, while Tom entered the yard and ran to the house.

He was almost upon the woman and girl before they noticed him, and then they gave utterance to screams of surprise and delight, and one after the other leaped into his arms and showered kisses upon him.

"Oh, Tom, Tom! I'm so glad to see you," murmured Lucy, as the youth pressed her to his heart.

"And I'm more than glad to see you, sweetheart," he said. "I am wild with delight."

Mr. Farrell looked at Dick with considerable curiosity as the youth approached, and greeted him pleasantly, even though there was a questioning look on his face.

The "Liberty Boy" noticed the questioning look, and said:

"I came here with your son Tom, Mr. Farrell. I am his friend, and my name is Dick Slater. He has invited me to stay overnight with him."

"Tom!" exclaimed the patriot. "Is Tom here, sure enough?"

"Yonder at the house," said Dick, motioning.

Mr. Farrell looked, and saw his son greeting his mother and sweetheart, and then extended his hand.

"And you say you are Dick Slater?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir," replied the youth, taking the proffered hand.

"Well, I am glad to make the acquaintance of one who has earned such a wonderful reputation as a scout, spy, and fighter as you have done, Mr. Slater," shaking the youth's hand heartily.

"And I am always glad to make the acquaintance of patriots, sir," the youth replied.

By this time Tom had finished greeting his mother and sweetheart, and excusing himself, came running out into the barnlot and greeted his father.

"This is Dick Slater, father," he said, indicating Dick.

"Yes; we have already become acquainted, Tom," his father replied.

"But he didn't tell you how he saved me from a terrible beating at the hands of the Snaggs', did he?"

"No," in surprise. "How was that?"

Tom told the story of his fight with Jim Snaggs, and his son Ben, and how Dick had interfered and put them to flight, and when he had finished Mr. Farrell seized Dick's hand again, and shook it heartily once more.

"We owe you thanks for the aid you rendered Tom," he said; "we will remember it, Mr. Slater."

"Oh, that is all right, Mr. Farrell. I never like to see anything unfair, and when I saw Tom, here, having to contend with two, and one of the two with a big club in his hands, I at once decided to interfere—was glad to do so, in fact. And when I learned that Tom was a patriot, and that the other two were Tories, I was more glad than ever."

Then the horse was led into the stable, and the bridle and saddle were removed, and giving the animal some feed, the three made their way to the house.

Here Dick was introduced to Mrs. Farrell and Lucy Hopper, and when Tom told the story of what Dick had done for him the "Liberty Boy" came in for thanks from the woman and girl.

After some further conversation Lucy said she must go home, and Tom at once leaped up to accompany her.

"I'll walk over home with Lucy, mother," he said; "and will be back in time for supper."

"Very well, Tom," was the reply.

Tom and his sweetheart left the house, and made their way slowly through the timber in the direction of the girl's home, while Mrs. Farrell went into the kitchen and began the work of getting supper, and Dick and Mr. Farrell remained in the sitting-room, talking of the war.

"By the way," said Mr. Farrell, "I have learned this afternoon that Arnold's men are coming up into this part of the country soon, for the purpose of robbing and pillaging, and burning the homes of the patriots."

"That is bad news, sir," said Dick.

"Yes, indeed."

"How will they know which are the patriots, and which the Tories?"

"Arnold has been furnished with a list of the names of the patriots."

"Ah, that's the way they will know, eh?"

"Yes."

"How did Arnold secure the list?"

"It was furnished him by Tories who live in this neighborhood."

"That seems like a mighty poor piece of business, the betraying of friends and neighbors in that way," said Dick.

"Yes, indeed; but there are Tories in this neighborhood who would kill all the patriots if they dared do it."

"I don't doubt it, sir," said Dick, a shadow coming over his face. "My own father was shot down in front of his house by Tories, Mr. Farrell."

"Too bad! Too bad, my boy."

"But I killed the man who shot father!" said Dick grimly.

"That was some satisfaction, at least, Mr. Slater."

"Yes, but it didn't bring my father back to life again."

"True, true."

Presently Mrs. Farrell announced that supper was ready, and Tom returning just at that time, they all sat up to the table and ate supper.

"Now, what is to be done about this affair of the patriot settlers of the vicinity?" asked Dick, when supper was over. "It is our duty to warn them that Arnold's men are coming soon, is it not?"

"Yes, indeed," said Mr. Farrell. "Tom and I will start at once."

"I will go also," said Dick.

"But you don't know who are patriots and who not."

"That doesn't matter. I will be able to find out very quickly after reaching a house."

So they decided on the route each should take, and set out, Mr. Farrell telling his wife they would be gone perhaps two hours.

The "Liberty Boy" went up the road in the direction of the James River. He was to stop at three houses before reaching the river, and then was to turn to the left, follow the river a mile, when he would reach another road. He was to turn once more to the left and go toward the south two miles, cross back to the road he had started out on, and return to Mr. Farrell's house.

The youth set out, and warned the people in the three houses between the starting-point and the river. Reaching the stream, he turned to the left, and made his way through the timber.

It was as dark as Erebus, and Dick could scarcely see his hand before his face.

The timber was quite heavy, and there was a thick and in many places tangled undergrowth, through which it was hard to force his way.

Dick was used to the timber, however, and did better than most persons would have been able to do under the circumstances.

He kept on going, and at last reached the road he was in search of.

"Ah, now I am all right," he murmured. "I am glad to be out of the wilderness."

Turning to the left, he made his way down the road.

Presently he came to a house, and as it was the first one

he had reached, he knew it was the home of a patriot, Mr. Farrell having informed him that the first, third, fourth, seventh, and eighth houses he would reach after turning southward were the homes of patriots.

He paused and warned the patriot family, and then made his way onward down the road.

The next house was the home of a Tory, and Dick passed by without stopping.

The next house was the home of a patriot, and Dick paused there and gave them warning, after which he continued on his way.

He was aware that the next house beyond this one was the home of a patriot, but it so happened that there was no light in the house in question, and as it stood quite a ways back from the road Dick did not discover it, but went on past.

Half a mile farther on he came to a house, and entering the yard knocked on the door.

"Who is there?" called out a voice.

"A friend," called out Dick.

"A friend?"

"Yes."

"What do you want, friend?"

"I have come to warn you."

"To warn me?"

"Yes."

"Of what?"

"Of the fact that Arnold's men are coming up from Petersburg on a pillaging and burning expedition."

"You say Arnold's men are coming?"

"I do."

There was the sound of shuffling feet within, and then the voice was heard close to the door.

"Wait a minute, if you please," said the voice. "I want to ask you a few questions."

"All right," replied Dick.

There was a rattling sound, as if a bar was being taken down from across the door, and then the door opened.

Dick saw a large, rough-looking man standing in the doorway. As the man's back was to the light, which consisted of but a single candle, Dick could not get a very good look at the fellow's face. He had no doubt that the owner of the house was a patriot, however, so did not pay much attention to his looks.

"Come in and have a seat," the man invited. "It is more comfortable sitting than standing."

The "Liberty Boy" entered, the man closing the door after him, and both took seats.

"So the British are coming up into this part of the country, are they?" the man asked, looking at Dick keenly.

"Yes; so I have been informed."

"You don't know just when they are coming?"

"No, sir; but they will be here at an early day."

"And you are warning all the patriots in this vicinity?"

"Yes."

"That is kind of you. By the way, what is your name?"

"My name is Dick Slater."

"Ah, indeed?" in a surprised tone, "and are you the famous young man who has made such a reputation as a scout and spy, and as captain of the company of young men who call themselves 'The Liberty Boys of '76'?"

"I am the captain of the 'Liberty Boys,' yes, sir."

"Good! That being the case, it gives me great pleasure to tell you, Dick Slater, that you are a prisoner."

The youth stared at his host in amazement.

"A prisoner?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

The man's voice was calm and even, and he sat there, without having made a move toward drawing a weapon. There was a half-smile on his face. Noticing this, Dick thought the man must be joking.

"I guess you are just trying to startle me," the youth remarked, quietly.

The other shook his head.

"Oh, no; I mean it," he said.

"You do?"

"Yes."

"But I am not a prisoner."

"Yes, you are."

"How do you make that out?"

"Easy enough; just turn your head and look behind you."

At first the youth would not do so, thinking it a ruse to enable the other to catch him at a disadvantage, but a voice spoke up from behind him, saying:

"There is no trick in it, Dick Slater; just look this way, and you will see that what he says is true."

The "Liberty Boy" turned his head at this, and sure enough, there stood at least ten men, each and every one with a pistol leveled at him.

CHAPTER V.

"THE LOYAL DOZEN."

To the surprise of the men who had sprung such a surprise on Dick, the youth did not seem to be alarmed, but was as cool and unconcerned as could be, at least so far as outward seeming went.

"Well, you have rather got the better of me, seemingly," he remarked, quietly.

"You are right," said the man who had got him to enter the house. "I flatter myself that we have trapped you nicely."

"Well, what are you going to do with me?"

"That is a question that is to be decided later."

"I think you had better let me go my way in peace," said Dick.

The men laughed.

"Of course you would think that," said the leader; "but you see, we have different ideas regarding the matter."

"Who are you fellows?" asked Dick.

"You wish to know?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"So that I may know to whom I owe this little surprise party, and to enable me to know who to get even with when the time comes."

"Oh, that's why you wish to know, is it?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, it will be time wasted in telling you."

"Why so?"

"Because you will never be in a position to get even with us."

"You think so?"

"I do."

"Well; you have a right to your thoughts, I suppose; and I have a right to mine."

"Yes," with a smile. "You have a right to your thoughts, but they won't do you much good, I fear."

"Well, if you think I will never get a chance to get even with you, you should have no hesitancy in satisfying my curiosity with regard to who you are."

"True; and I will do so. We are a number of men who live in this vicinity, who are loyal to the king, and have banded ourselves together for the purpose of doing what we can to aid his cause."

"That is who you are, eh?"

"Yes; we call ourselves 'The Loyal Dozen'."

"The Loyal Dozen, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm much obliged to you for telling me who you are, and I promise you that I will make every effort to get even with you for the trick you have played on me."

The leader of the party laughed.

"That is all right," he said. "We are quite willing you should get even with us—if you get the chance."

"I am one of the kind of chaps who make the chance," said Dick quietly.

"Oh, you are?" There was sarcasm in the tones.

"Yes."

"But this time you will be unable to do anything of that kind, I think."

"You think so, do you?"

"Yes."

"Now tell me what you are going to do with me."

"Very well. We are going to take you to Petersburg."

"To Petersburg?"

"Yes; and turn you over to General Arnold."

"Yes?"

"Yes; and we shall claim the reward of five hundred pounds which is offered for your capture."

"I see. You are after the money."

"Yes; but we will be aiding the king's cause at the same time, you know."

"I see. You will be helping his cause and your own at the same time."

"That is it, exactly."

"You are a band of men who have an eye out to the main chance, in other words."

"Yes. Do you blame us?"

"Oh, no, I can't say that I do."

"No sensible man could blame us."

"Certainly not."

Now, all the time Dick was talking, he was thinking rapidly to the point.

He was a veteran, and had been in tight places a score of times while acting as a spy; consequently he had not given up hope of getting out of the trap into which he had walked.

He was taking everything into consideration and one of the main things that occurred to him was the fact that these men who held him seemingly at such a disadvantage, were common settlers and farmers, who had not had the experience in fighting that was necessary to enable them to do good work, and the "Liberty Boy" was sure that if he were to take them by surprise by making a sudden move that they were not expecting, he would have an excellent opportunity of getting away.

"I don't believe that they would fire if I were to get out of the room," the youth thought; "they would be afraid of shooting one another, and I may be able to get through their line and get out of the room in spite of all they can do."

He had noticed the fact that just back of the gang of men was an open door; and he understood that they had entered by way of this door when they took him by surprise.

The youth believed it possible that he could reach the door, and get out of the room, and he was determined to make the attempt. He was talking with the leader for the purpose of throwing all off their guard somewhat, when he would make the dash.

"Well," remarked the leader, "I guess we might as well make a prisoner of you, in reality, Dick Slater. Place your hands together behind your back."

The "Liberty Boy" realized that it would not do to delay the attempt to escape any longer.

The time had come for him to act.

He did not hesitate.

His experience had taught him that prompt and decisive action was essential to success.

So he acted promptly and decisively.

"All right," he said, quietly; "I will place my hands—where they will do me the most good!"

With the last words, Dick whirled and leaped toward the men with the quickness and fierceness of the panther.

He was upon the men before they could realize what he was doing, and with a sweeping blow from right and left hands at the same instant, he knocked the muzzles of several pistols aside.

This caused sufficient pressure on the triggers of several of the weapons to cause them to go off, and crack, crack, crack! the pistols went, and thud, thud, thud, thud! went the bullets against the wall.

All, save one bullet, which struck the leader of the band

in the calf of the leg, and caused him to leap wildly to his feet, and give utterance to a most unearthly howl of pain and rage.

Then smack, smack, smack, smack! went Dick's fists against the faces of the Tories, and down the fellows went, kerthump!

So sudden, unexpected and fierce was Dick's action that the Tories were taken wholly by surprise, and they were unable to do anything, the result being, that almost before they knew it, their intended prisoner had leaped through the open doorway and disappeared.

"He can't get away," cried one of the Tories, who had escaped being hit by Dick's fists, and was more cool-headed than the rest. "Come on, we'll capture him yet."

He leaped to the door, and through the opening only to come in violent contact with Dick's fist, which knocked him back into the room he was leaving in such a hurry.

He carried down two more men as he went, and there was a great crash as they struck the floor.

This caused the Tories to hesitate to try to pass through the doorway, and Dick, knowing this would be the case, was making good use of the opportunity thus afforded to get away.

He could not see very well, the room he was in being unlighted, but he hastened across the floor, and felt around until he found a door.

He tried the door but found it fastened.

A quick search gave him the knowledge that a bar was across the door.

He jerked the bar down, and as he did so, a quick glance over his shoulder showed him that his enemies were coming through the doorway from the other room.

Instantly Dick whirled and attacked them with the bar, which was a heavy oaken affair, and he was enabled to do such terrible execution with this weapon that the Tories became demoralized, and fell over one another in their efforts to get back into the other room quickly.

One or two then whirled around and fired their pistols off, but they did not stop to take aim, and the result was that the bullets did not come anywhere near Dick.

Seeing that he had the best of the affair so far, Dick rushed back to the door, dropped the bar, jerked the door open and leaped out into the yard.

He did not linger an instant but rushed around the house and came upon a party of men, one of whom was knocking on the front door of the house.

Instinctively Dick seemed to know the strangers were redcoats, and he called out in an excited voice:

"Look out! Be on your guard; the house is full of rebels."

The party of men opened and let Dick pass through, and then drawing their weapons they dashed around the house.

"Now, I had better make myself scarce," thought Dick, and he did not pause an instant but kept right on running at the top of his speed.

CHAPTER VI.

DICK'S CLEVER ESCAPE.

The redcoats—for the strangers really were British soldiers, as Dick had suspected—dashed around the house, and reached the rear door just as the Tories were coming forth.

"Halt! Stop or you are dead men!" roared the leader of the redcoats, as he and his men presented their pistols full in the Tories' faces.

The Tories came to a stop instantly.

They supposed, at first, that they had encountered a party of patriots, but a second glance showed them the scarlet uniforms of the strangers, and they realized that they were friends instead of enemies.

"We are friends!" cried the Tory leader, "don't shoot."

"You say you are friends?" cried the redcoat captain.

"Yes, yes! You are British soldiers, are you not?"

"Yes, we are troopers."

"Well, we are loyal king's men."

"But that fellow who came running around the house just now, said you were rebels."

"He was a rebel himself, and fooled you."

"The deuce you say!"

"Yes, he is the notorious Dick Slater, on whose head there is a price, and we are trying to capture him."

"You don't mean it!"

"Yes, I swear I am telling the truth."

"Quick, then, men!" cried the British captain; "we will have to hurry or he will get away."

They dashed back around the house, and out to the front yard gate and through it.

Here they made the startling discovery that their horses, ten in number—this being the number of the troopers—were gone.

"Listen!" cried the captain.

All listened and the clatter of hoofs could be plainly heard down the road toward the south.

"The scoundrelly rebel has stolen our horses!" cried the officer with a string of oaths.

"It is just what might be expected of him, if he is Dick Slater," said another.

"Well, that is who he is; he told me so with his own lips," said the Tory leader, he and his comrades having followed the redcoats out to the road.

"I don't doubt it a bit," the captain said. "The trick he played on us proves that he is a quick-witted and daring scoundrel."

"That's what he is!" from several of the redcoats in chorus.

"Well, if ever I get a chance at him I will put an end to his playing tricks, for all time to come!" cried the captain; "to think that I, Captain Jordan, of the British service, should permit myself to be fooled by a rascally rebel, and

let him get away with the horses of the entire party is almost too much for me to endure."

"It is a pretty bitter dose to be forced to swallow, sure enough," agreed the Tory leader. "Curse the fellow! he put a bullet into my leg—or rather, caused it to be done, the bullet coming from the pistol of one of my own men."

"How was that?"

The Tory explained.

"And you say Dick Slater is warning the Patriot settlers that our men are coming up here on a burning and pillaging expedition?"

"Yes; at least he warned me when he thought I was a rebel settler."

"I wonder how he discovered that we were going to do this?"

"I don't know. He is an expert spy, though, as you are doubtless aware, and he may have been right in Petersburg, spying."

"That is possible—blast him!"

"What are we to do, captain?" asked one of the troopers.

"That is the question. I hardly know what to do."

"Come in the house and talk the matter over," suggested the Tory leader.

"All right. That is a good suggestion. Come on, boys."

Then the entire party went to the house and entered.

Here we will leave them for the present and see what has become of Dick.

When the redcoats parted and permitted him to pass through, Dick was delighted, and kept right on running until he was at the front yard fence.

He passed through the gate and his eyes fell upon the horses of the redcoats.

"Just the thing," said the youth to himself. "I'll take a horse and get away from here in a hurry."

Then the thought came to him that he would be pursued, and in case it should happen that he had selected one of the poorer horses, he might be overtaken. This made him think of taking all the horses.

"There are not more than ten of them," he said to himself; "and I can get away with that number all right."

He untied the horses one after another, and tied the halter straps to the horns of the saddles. In this way all of the horses were fastened together, with the exception of the one he was to ride.

Having completed his arrangements, the "Liberty Boy" leaped into the saddle and rode away, the other horses following, because of the fact that they were tied together.

At first Dick was forced to ride slowly, but presently he succeeded in coaxing the led horses to strike into a gallop, and after that he made good time.

Presently he came to a house, and paused.

"I wonder whether this is the home of a Patriot or whether a Tory lives here?" he said to himself.

There was no way of getting an answer to the question save by going into the house and making inquiry, and dismounting, he tied the horse, and made his way to the house and knocked on the door.

It was presently opened by a pretty girl of perhaps fifteen years.

"Your father is a Tory is he not?" asked Dick in a brisk, businesslike manner.

"No, he is not," was the reply; "my father is a Patriot."

"Ah, indeed? Well, I am glad to hear it, miss," said Dick; "tell him that I have come to warn him that the British under Arnold are getting ready to come into this part of the country to plunder, pillage and burn the homes of the Patriots, and for him to make such preparations as he is able to make at short notice."

"And who are you, who bring such news?" asked a man suddenly appearing in the doorway beside the girl.

"I am a Patriot, sir, like yourself," said Dick.

"How do I know that, and that there is not some trick back of this warning?"

"You will have to take my word for it, sir, I suppose; and I think that you will find it to your advantage to give credence to the warning, for I am telling the truth only."

"Tell me who you are, then," said the man; "I do not think I have ever seen you before, and it does not pay in these times to listen to every man that comes along."

"My name is Slater, sir—Dick Slater, and——"

"What!" exclaimed the man, excitedly; "surely you do not mean to tell me that you are the great Dick Slater, who has made himself famous as a scout and a spy, and whose 'Liberty Boys' have done such famous work on the battle-fields?"

"Yes, sir; I am the only Dick Slater I ever heard of, and I am captain of 'The Liberty Boys of '76.'"

"Tell me, then, Dick Slater, did you not have a young man in your company one time, a young man who said that he had run away from home and that his name was Frank Graves?"

"Yes, indeed!" said Dick, "I had such a man in my company up to two weeks ago."

"Oh, sir, where is he now?" cried the girl; "is he not with you? Surely he is not dead?"

"No, he is not dead—or I do not think he is," said Dick; "he was wounded in a fight with the redcoats, down in North Carolina two weeks ago, and we left him at the home of a Patriot settler there."

"Was he severely wounded, Mr. Slater?" asked the man, his voice trembling with excitement; "you will pardon us for seeming so excited, sir, when you learn that the boy in question is my son and this girl's brother."

"Certainly," said Dick; "and this is Frank's home? Well, well! I am indeed glad to know you, Mr. Graves; and you, Miss Nettie."

"You know my name?" cried the girl.

"Yes; I have heard Frank speak of his sister Nettie many times, and I know you must be she."

"Yes, yes! Oh, father, isn't it grand that we have been able to hear from Frank in this fashion!"

"Yes, indeed! Come in, Mr. Slater, and tell my wife what you have told us. She is in bed, sick, and her sick-

ness is really the result of worry over not hearing from Frank. You are sure his wound was not severe enough to cause his death?"

"I could not say positively, sir, as there never is any absolute certainty about such things; but I can truthfully say that according to my judgment, this was not necessarily very serious. It was painful and was of a nature that would make it necessary for him to remain quiet and take care of himself for a few weeks, but I would not expect it to be fatal by any means."

"Thank God for that! Come in, Mr. Slater; come in, and tell my wife the news."

The youth entered, and was conducted to a bedroom on the ground floor, where a woman, of perhaps forty-five years lay in bed. She was evidently ill, but she had heard the murmur of the voices, and looked up as the three entered, with an eager look in her eyes.

"What is it, William?" she asked eagerly, but weakly; "have you heard any news of my darling boy?"

"Yes, Martha," replied the man in a gentle voice; "this young man brings news of Frank."

The woman turned her eyes on Dick's face and looked at him eagerly and beseechingly.

"Oh, sir, is my son alive?" she asked tremulously.

"Yes, Mrs. Graves," replied Dick, gently; "your son was alive when I saw him last, which was two weeks ago."

"Thank God!" the woman cried fervently; "but where is my son now, sir?"

"He is down in North Carolina at the home of a Patriot, Mrs. Graves."

"Why is he there? Was he—is—he—wounded?"

"Yes, but not dangerously, I am sure, lady. He was wounded and we left him there to get well."

"This is Dick Slater, the captain of the company of 'Liberty Boys,' whose force Frank joined, mother," said the girl, gently smoothing her mother's hair from her forehead.

"Ah, indeed. You are Captain Slater, then, sir?"

"Yes," said Dick, "and I must say that your son is one of the finest young fellows I have ever known. He is as brave as a lion and knows not the meaning of the word fear."

"And you think he will get well, Captain Slater?" the woman asked eagerly.

"I do, Mrs. Graves; I am confident that he will. Indeed, I have no doubt that he is up and around by this time."

"Oh, if I could only be sure such was the case, I believe I could get up and be well in a few days, myself!" the woman said, tremulously.

"Then get up at once, mother!" said a clear, ringing voice, and all turned to see a handsome young man of about Dick's age standing in the doorway with a bright smile on his face.

"Frank Graves!" exclaimed Dick.

"My son!" cried Mr. and Mrs. Graves in unison, while from Nettie's lips went up the exclamation:

"Brother Frank!"

It was indeed Frank Graves alive and apparently as well as usual.

CHAPTER VII.

DICK RETURNS TO RICHMOND.

The youth hastened to the bedside and gave his mother a kiss, and a tender embrace, and then shook hands with his father and threw his arms around his sister and hugged and kissed her.

This finished, he gave Dick his hand and greeted him heartily.

"How happens it that you are here, Frank?" asked Dick; "I didn't suppose you would be out of doors by this time, let alone away up here."

"My wound wasn't so serious as we thought, Dick, and I was able to travel within a week of the time you left me there; I was bound I wouldn't stay any longer, and mounting my horse, I set out. I lost three days trying to find you, and then learning that you had come up into Virginia I struck up in this direction. Not finding you, I decided to come home for a few days, or until I did learn where the 'Liberty Boys' were, and here I am."

"I am glad to see you, Frank."

"And I am glad to see you, old fellow, where are the rest of the boys?"

"Up at Richmond."

"Ah. What are you doing, Dick?"

"Trying to keep track of the redcoats and hold them in check and prevent them from burning and pillaging the homes of the Patriots."

"The redcoats are at Petersburg, aren't they?"

"Yes; Arnold the traitor is in command there."

"So I learned as I came up this way. I came through Petersburg and I had hard work fooling the British, and making my escape. They seemed to suspect that I was a Patriot."

"I guess that you were lucky to get away."

"I judge so. But where did all those horses come from, that I saw out in front of the house, Dick?"

"I captured them, Frank."

"Captured them?"

"Yes."

"Who from?"

"A party of British troopers."

"Good! That sounds like old times. But where are the troopers now?"

"I left them at a Tory's house about a mile and a half back on the road."

"That must have been Joe Walton's home, don't you think, father?" turning to Mr. Graves.

"Likely, Frank."

"And the troopers are likely to come this way pretty soon, Dick," said Frank; "you had better be getting away

with your horses—not that I wish to hurry you away, but I don't want you to lose the animals, after capturing them."

"I was just on the point of saying that I must be going," said Dick; "and now, Mr. Graves, since you know the British are coming, you will make such preparations as are possible, in order to keep them from getting much that is of value."

"Yes, Mr. Slater, I will get everything out of the way but the house; that I cannot move."

"True. Well, I will say good-bye and go," and Dick shook hands with Mr., Mrs. and Nettie Graves.

"What are you going to do, Dick?" asked Frank.

"I am going to start for Richmond with the horses I have captured."

"And then what?"

"I am going to bring the 'Liberty Boys' back with me, and we will make it as lively as possible for the British when they come up here on their plundering and burning expedition."

"Good! I will go with you, Dick"

"It won't be necessary, Dick. You had better stay here and help your father. I can get the horses along, all right, and when I return with my 'Liberty Boys' you can join us."

"All right. Just as you say, Dick."

The youth did not delay longer, but telling Frank to look out for the party of troopers, he went out and, mounting his horse, rode away, leading the other nine animals.

He rode on toward the south until he reached the home of another Patriot—Mr. Graves having told him where the Patriot lived—and stopping, Dick warned the man.

This done, he rode onward, and presently came to a cross road. This was just what he was looking for, and turning, he rode eastward.

The road wound and twisted like a serpent, but the youth let the horse have its head, and the sagacious animal kept to the road without difficulty, even though it was so dark that Dick could scarcely see his hand before his face.

Fifteen or twenty minutes later the other road was reached, and turning again to the left, Dick rode toward the north.

A mile or so in this direction he came to the home of Mr. Farrell. The moon was just coming above the tree tops, and as Dick rode up he saw Mr. Farrell and Tom standing at the yard gate.

"Hello, is that you, Dick?" called out Tom in a voice indicative of surprise.

"Yes, Tom," replied Dick.

"Great guns! Where did you get the horses?"

"Captured them."

"Where?"

"Over on the other road."

"Who from?"

"The redcoats."

"Good! What are they—a party of troopers?"

"Yes; ten of them."

"And you got away with their horses?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is the best thing I have heard of lately. The redcoats will have to walk back to Petersburg."

Dick leaped to the ground, and Tom started to go to the barnlot gate to open it, thinking Dick would bring the horses in, but the youth motioned for him to wait.

"I am going to Richmond with the horses," he said. "They will come in handy for our men, and then, I am going to bring my 'Liberty Boys' back here."

"You are?" cried Tom delightedly.

"Yes."

"And you are going to try to make it hot for the redcoats who come up here to burn and pillage?"

"That is just what I am going to do."

"Good. And I'll help you. I'll join your 'Liberty Boys,' and help thrash the redcoats."

"Very well."

"When will you be back here?"

"To-morrow morning."

"All right. You will come here to our house?"

"Yes."

"Good!"

Dick did not delay longer, but leaped into the saddle and rode away, while Mr. Farrell and Tom went in the house and told Mrs. Farrell that Dick Slater was going to do.

"I tell you, we'll make the redcoats wish they had stayed away from here!" said Tom. "The 'Liberty Boys' are terrible fellows when it comes to fighting, and may be counted on to thrash three or four times their number."

"I hope they will be able to defeat the object of the British," said Mrs. Farrell. "It is terrible to think that the homes of the patriots may be burned, and all their property carried away."

"We'll put a stop to their scheme, you may be sure, mother," said Tom.

"We, you say, Tom?"

"Yes; I'm going to join the 'Liberty Boys,' and help them fight the British."

"But will General Marion permit you to do that, Tom?"

"Yes; he said I might stay at home a month, if I liked; and I might just as well put in the time in a good way as to put it in sitting around home, here, doing nothing."

Meantime Dick was riding northward at a gallop.

It was a long trip to Richmond, but he reached there about three o'clock in the morning and went at once to the quarters occupied by the "Liberty Boys."

Having placed the captured horses where they would be safe till morning, Dick entered the "Liberty Boys" quarters, sought his cot, and throwing himself down, was soon asleep.

He was up bright and early, next morning, and when the other youths saw him they began asking questions.

Where had he been?

Had he seen any redcoats?

Had he discovered anything about the British?

Was he going away again, soon?

Such were only a few of the questions asked him.

The youth answered the questions, and told his comrades the story of his adventures the night before, and how he had captured ten horses from British troopers.

The youths were delighted by the story, and said Dick had done well.

"I wish some of us had been with you," said Bob Estabrook, a bright, handsome young fellow of Dick's age. "We would have captured the troopers, as well as their horses."

"True," agreed Dick. "Well, I'm going again, right away after breakfast, and I am going to take you boys with me."

"All of us, Dick?"

"Yes."

"Hurrah!"

Exclamations of delight were heard on every hand. It was plain that the "Liberty Boys" were greatly pleased.

"But what is going on, down the other side of the James River, Dick?" asked Mark Morrison. "There must be something unusual on tapis, or you wouldn't take us down there."

"You are right, Mark; the British are coming up into the region lying between the river and Petersburg, and are going to burn and plunder the homes of the patriots."

"I see; and you want us to be there to hold them in check, if possible."

"That is it, exactly."

"Good! We can do it, Dick."

"I think so. We can come very near doing it, anyway."

"Oh, we'll be able to make the redcoats wish they had stayed in Petersburg," declared Bob.

"And you say we are to start immediately after breakfast, Dick?" from Sam Sanderson.

"Yes."

"Then let's have breakfast, quick!" was the eager cry.

"Yes, yes. Let's not fool away any time."

They soon had their frugal repast prepared, and ate it hastily.

"Now you boys get ready," said Dick. "I will go and get permission from General Lafayette to take you boys and go down south of the river."

"Well, hurry, Dick," from Bob.

"I won't be gone long."

The youth hastened away, and was soon at the house occupied by General Lafayette and his officers.

The orderly knew Dick, and showed him into the presence of Lafayette at once.

"Ah, Dick, I am glad to see you," said Lafayette. "When did you get back?"

"About three o'clock this morning, sir," was the reply.

"And did you learn anything of importance?"

"Yes, sir."

"Tell me about it."

The youth told about the redcoats' scheme for coming up into the country north of Petersburg and burning and plundering the patriot homes, and finished by asking per-

mission to take his "Liberty Boys" and go down there to hold the redcoats in check.

"You shall do as you ask, Dick," said General Lafayette.

"Take your 'Liberty Boys' and go down there, if you like—but be very careful, and don't let the redcoats catch you, for I could not spare you."

"All right, sir; we will be careful," replied Dick. "Thank you for giving me permission to go."

"That is all right, Dick. I know that you will be engaged in a noble work, and it is worth while taking some risks, if by so doing the homes of patriots are saved from the flames."

"Yes, indeed."

Then Dick bade the general good-by, and hastened back to the "Liberty Boys" quarters with the good news.

Half an hour later the "Liberty Boys" rode out of Richmond, and heading toward the south, dashed away at a gallop.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE "LIBERTY BOYS" AT WORK.

It was about ten o'clock when the party of "Liberty Boys" came in sight of the home of David Farrell, and as they rounded a bend in the road and caught sight of the house, exclamations escaped the youths' lips.

"The redcoats!"

"The British, sure as guns!"

"We are just in time!"

"It isn't a very big party!"

"We can eat them up!"

Such were a few of the cries.

The youths were right, too, for in front of the Farrell home were perhaps fifty redcoats. They were just dismounting from their horses.

Dick took all in at one sweeping glance, and then drawing his sword he cried:

"Forward, Liberty Boys! Charge the scoundrels!"

Forward dashed the "Liberty Boys" at the best speed of their horses.

As they went, they cocked their cavalry muskets, and when they were in musket-shot distance, they fired a volley.

This was the first intimation the redcoats had of the coming of an enemy.

Their attention had been on the house, and they had not noticed the approaching horsemen.

When they heard the sound of the volley, however, and saw a number of their men drop, either dead or wounded, they suddenly awoke to the danger.

A glance was all that was needed to tell them that they were outnumbered, and they leaped back into the saddles much quicker than they had leaped out, and with yells of fright and anger, dashed away down the road.

"After them!" cried Dick. "We must teach them a lesson they won't forget in a hurry!"

With wild cheers the "Liberty Boys" dashed down the road in pursuit of the fleeing redcoats.

It was an exciting race.

The British troopers belabored their horses with the flat of their sabers, and the animals went at their best speed.

The "Liberty Boys" were well-mounted, but their horses were not so fresh as were the animals ridden by the British, and they were unable to overhaul the flying foe.

They kept up the chase a mile or more, and then, seeing they were losing ground, they came to a stop, at an order from Dick, and turning, rode back to the Farrell home.

They found Mr. Farrell and Tom out in the road, doing what they could for the wounded redcoats, of whom there were five.

Six had been killed outright by the volley.

"Well, we got here just in time, Tom," said Dick, as he and his "Liberty Boys" rode up.

"Yes," replied Tom. "They would have had our house burned to the ground soon, if you had not put in an appearance, I judge."

"Undoubtedly; but we upset their calculations a bit."

"So you did—and you upset a few of the redcoats themselves as well."

"How many did we bring down?"

"Eleven. Six are dead and five are wounded."

"Well, we will bury the dead, and then we will decide what shall be done with the wounded."

"My wife says for us to bring them in the house," said Mr. Farrell. "She is willing to take care of them, even though they are enemies, and came to our house, bent on doing us as much damage as possible."

"She is a noble-hearted woman," said Dick. "Well, we will do as she requests."

Dick turned to his "Liberty Boys" and named a dozen of them, and told them to carry the wounded men into the house.

This was done, the wounded men being placed on blankets spread on the floor of a spare room.

"Now, get a spade, Tom," said Dick, "and go with my boys, and show them where to bury the dead redcoats."

"All right, Dick," and Tom went out and got the spade and made his way out to the road.

He told the "Liberty Boys" what Dick had said, and they carried the dead troopers across the road, and back in the timber a ways, and buried them.

Then they made their way back to the gate, to await further orders from their young commander.

Tom went back into the house, and found the wounded men resting easy, Dick having dressed their wounds with almost as much skill as would have been shown by a surgeon.

"What are you going to do next, Dick?" Tom asked.

"I hardly know, Tom. I think, however, that we will stay here till after dinner, and then I will decide what is next to be done."

"All right; we will be glad to have you stay."

"I am afraid we will make too much work for your mother, though, Tom."

"I will go over and get Lucy Hopper to come over here and help mother, Dick."

"You sly dog," laughed Dick, slapping Tom on the shoulder. "That is a good plan, however. Go after Lucy at once."

"I will," and Tom hastened away.

Dick went out and told the "Liberty Boys" to make arrangements for staying where they were until after dinner, and the youths unbridled and unsaddled their horses at once.

Then Dick sent a couple of the youths down the road, to keep watch for the redcoats.

"They might take it into their heads to try to get even with us for what we have done," he said with a smile.

"That's right," agreed Bob. "We must be on our guard, for we are closer to the British force than we are to our own army."

"You are right; we are practically in the enemy's country."

The party of British troopers slackened the speed of their horses as soon as it was discovered that the enemy had ceased to follow, and a halt was ordered.

The redcoats were an angry and disgusted lot of men.

They had been taken by surprise, and some of their men had been killed, and the rest had been forced to flee for their lives, and this was very galling.

"This is the most outrageous affair I ever had anything to do with," growled Captain Shannon, who was in command of the force of troopers.

"So it is, captain," agreed one of the troopers.

"But the rebels outnumbered us more than two to one," said another.

"And took us by surprise in the bargain," from another.

"We ought not to have permitted ourselves to be taken by surprise," the captain growled. "Let's see—how many men did we lose?"

"There are eleven missing," replied a trooper, who had been counting his comrades.

"Eleven, eh?"

"Yes."

"Jove, that is bad! To think that eleven of our brave boys should go down so quickly, and that we did not down a single one of the men who did the work."

"They were too strong for us, captain," said one. "If we had stood our ground and shown fight, we would have lost a lot more of our fellows, and perhaps the whole crowd would have been captured."

"That is true, too. Well, the question now is, what are we to do?"

"We must make an attempt to turn the tables on the rebels, captain," cried one of the troopers.

"Yes, but how are we to do it? There are at least a hundred in that party of rebels, while we have now only thirty-nine men."

"We must get two or three of the parties that left Peters-

burg this morning to join us, and then we will be able to kill or capture the entire gang of rebels."

"That's a good suggestion," the captain said.

The troopers all nodded their heads in assent.

"I'll tell you what we'll do," said the captain. "We will remain here, and three or four of you men will ride around till you find two or three of the other parties. When you find them get them to come here, and we will go back and strike the rebels a blow that they will not recover from very soon."

This was acted upon at once. The men all dismounted, with the exception of four, who rode away at a gallop.

"Make yourselves comfortable, boys," said the captain, "and as soon as we get a strong enough force we will go right back and give that gang of rebels such a thrashing as they never had administered to them before."

An hour passed, and then one of the troopers was seen coming back at the head of a party of fifty British soldiers.

The soldiers were on foot, and advanced slowly, but at last they reached the spot where the troopers were, and their commander and Captain Shannon held a council, and talked the affair over.

"If we can get as many more men as are in your party," said Captain Shannon, "we will go ahead, and make an attempt to strike the rebels a blow. We will outnumber them, and ought to be able to thrash them, for British soldiers are more than equal to the best rebel soldiers."

"Ye mustn't be too sure thet yer men are better fighters than them fellers, captain," said a voice, and a roughly-dressed youth of perhaps twenty years stepped out from behind a tree and faced the astonished officers and soldiers.

"Who are you?" cried the captain, sternly, his hand dropping on the hilt of his sword.

"I'm Ben Snaggs, captain."

"Ben Snaggs, eh?"

"Yes; an' I'm er loyal king's man."

"You are, eh?"

"Yes, captain."

"But what did you mean by saying I must not be too sure about our men being better fighters than the rebels?"

"Jest what I said, captain; yer men may be better fighters than mos' uv the rebel soldiers, but these rebels what killed yer men and made ye run air not common rebel soldiers."

"They are not, eh?"

"No."

"Do you know who and what they are?"

"Ye bet I do!"

"Then tell me who and what they are."

"They air ther comp'ny uv rebels thet air knowed ez 'Ther Liberty Boys' uv '76,' an' air jest ther worst fighters ye ever seen in all yer life."

CHAPTER IX.

LANK LIGE REAPPEARS.

"The 'Liberty Boys' of '76'!" cried the captain and the other officers in unison.

"The 'Liberty Boys'!" went up from the troopers and soldiers.

"Yes, ther 'Liberty Boys,'" said Ben Snaggs, pleased by the fact that he had caused surprise among the redcoats.

The British troopers and soldiers looked at one another in rather a doubtful manner.

They had heard of the "Liberty Boys," many times, and were aware that the youths in question were fearless and daring fighters. If it was the "Liberty Boys" that they were to have to encounter, then they were not so certain they would be able to turn the tables and get revenge for the treatment that the troopers had received.

"Jove, we will have to be careful what we do if those fellows are 'The Liberty Boys of 76,'" said the captain, and the other officer, a lieutenant, nodded his head in assent.

"You are right," he said. "I have never met the 'Liberty Boys,' but I have heard that they are desperate and daring fighters, and not afraid of anything."

"You are right. I never met them before this morning, but the way they went for my men proves that they are as daring and dangerous as they are said to be."

Then he turned again to Ben Snaggs.

"How do you know the rebels in question are the 'Liberty Boys'?" he asked.

"I heard 'em talkin', captain."

"Ah, you spied on them?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Arter they run ye feller's erway an' come back ter ther house."

"You were there when they came back?"

"Yes."

"Can you tell me how many of my men were killed?"

"I kin."

"How many, then?"

"Six."

"How do you know?"

"I seen ther 'Liberty Boys' when they wuz buryin' ther men."

"Ah! They buried my men, did they?"

"Yes."

"And what did they do with the five wounded men?"

"Kerried 'em inter ther house."

"Well, that shows they are possessed of some good traits, anyway."

At this juncture another party of British soldiers was seen approaching, and when it arrived, it was found to consist of twenty-five men.

"That runs our number up to more than one hundred," said Captain Shannon. "But it does not make us strong enough as yet."

"No. We must have a stronger force than the 'Liberty Boys,' or we may get ourselves into trouble," agreed the lieutenant.

Twenty minutes later another party put in an appearance, and it consisted of fifty men.

The fourth trooper returned a few minutes later, with the

information that he could not find any British soldiers, and so it was decided to move back up the road, and make the attack on the "Liberty Boys" with the force now at their command.

"We have one hundred and sixty-nine men," said the captain; "and I think we will be able to thrash even the 'Liberty Boys,' when we have the stronger force."

"I should think we could do so," agreed the lieutenant, and it was decided to make the attempt to thrash the "Liberty Boys."

It was now noon, however, and the British delayed starting until after they had eaten their lunch. Then they set out, up the road.

* * * * *

Tom Farrell was soon back from Mr. Hopper's home, and Lucy came with him.

The girl was glad of an excuse to be at the Farrell home, of course, and she plunged right into the work and helped Mrs. Farrell cook the dinner for the one hundred hungry "Liberty Boys."

This was no light task, but the woman and girl were equal to it, and it was not yet twelve o'clock when dinner was announced.

There was room in the house, at the long table, for twenty of the youths, but the rest could not get in, so they squatted down in front of the house, on their blankets spread on the ground and ate with as much relish as if they had been at the table. As one of the youths said, in response to a regretful statement of Mrs. Farrell, to the effect that she was sorry they had to eat out of doors, on the ground:

"It's the food we are after, lady; we don't care anything about having a table to eat off of, or a roof to eat under. The blue sky is plenty good enough roof for us, and the ground is as good a table as any man need want."

The youths ate heartily, for the two women had cooked good food, and plenty of it, and the meal was enjoyed by all. The wounded redcoats were given chicken-soup, and as one said to the other, they were not so bad off as they might have been, even though they were in the house of a patriot.

The "Liberty Boys" had just finished their dinner, and those who had eaten at the table had just come out of the house, Dick among them, when a tall, roughly-dressed man came through the front gate and approached.

Dick recognized the fellow at a glance.

He was no other than the man who had tried to catch Dick's horse the evening before—Lige Lankey, or, as he had called himself, Lank Lige.

"Well, my man, what do you want?" asked Dick, as the newcomer paused in front of him.

"I want ter tell you sumthin', Dick Slater," was the reply.

"What do you want to tell me?"

"Thet ye air in danger heer."

"In danger, eh?"

"Yas."

"Who from?"

"Ther redecoats."

Dick eyed the man searchingly.

"Why have you come to me to warn me of danger?" he asked in a somewhat stern voice.

"Becos I'm er Patriot."

"You are a Patriot?" There was doubt and distrust in the voice, and in the look which Dick bent upon the man, and he saw it.

"Yas, I'm er Patriot; though I expeck yer don't believe me when I say et."

"You will pardon me if I say you are right."

"I'm er Patriot, though, just the same."

"You are"

"I am."

"Then why did you try to steal my horse yesterday evening?"

"Thet's simple enuff. I didn't know who the horse belonged ter, en I thort I might as well hev ther animal as not."

"Oh, that was the way of it?"

"Yes, I had just come up, an' made up my min' thet the horse belonged ter er British officer, and so I wuz goin' ter take him—an' I'd hev done et, too, if the critter hadn't been sech a kicker."

Dick laughed.

"The man who gets hold of that horse will have to be pretty smart," he said; "I never tie Major, and I am never afraid of not finding him where I left him when I get back."

"Oh, he's er great horse, an' no mistake."

"But, now, what about the redecoats? You say that you know something about them and their intentions."

"I do, too. I know ye jumped onter a gang uv troopers an' made them skedaddle; an' they are just hungerin fer a chance ter get back at ye."

"I don't doubt that, but there can't be more than thirty-five or forty of them, and they could not damage us."

"Oh, but theer's more uv 'em than thet, now."

"How do you know?"

"Becos I've be'n down ther road, keepin' watch onter 'em, an' I see er lot more redecoats come an join 'em."

"Ah. That is the way of it, eh?"

"Yas."

"How many men will they have, do you think?"

"Er hundred and fifty at ther very least."

"Ah, so many as that?"

"Yas."

"And do you think they will come here and make an attack on us?"

"Thet's whut they intend to do."

"You know this?"

"Yas! I heerd 'em talkin'."

"And they said that they were going to come here and attack us?"

"Yes; thet was whut they said; and I think they'll be heer afore long."

"Were they getting ready to come when you left there?"

"No, they wuz eatin' ther dinner."

"Ah, I see; and they will start as soon as they get through their dinner."

"They're through and started by this time."

"Likely enough."

"Theer hain't no doubt about et."

"Well, now, the matter of getting ready to receive them must have immediate attention; let me see, how shall we work it?"

"Let's go down the road a ways and ambush them," said Bob Estabrook.

"That is a good idea, Bob, and that is exactly what we will do."

"Yes, yes! That's the thing to do," was the cry from the "Liberty Boys," and Dick gave the order for the youths to move.

They hastened down the road a quarter of a mile, and hid themselves in the edge of the timber bordering the road.

Their line stretched along a distance of more than one hundred yards, and Dick's instructions to the youths were to let the enemy go till the front ranks had come even with the end of the "Liberty Boys" line, and then at the signal from him, to open fire.

The youths said that they would remember and obey the orders to the letter, and all settled down and began making preparations for the encounter.

The youths looked at their weapons carefully, for they did not want that there should be any missfires when the time came.

Lank Lige insisted on remaining and helping fight the redecoats, and as Dick now had every confidence in the fellow, and was sure that he would be a good man in a fight, he told the lanky one to remain and aid in the welcome.

"Ye thort I wuz a Tory," said the fellow with a grin; "but I think that afore this here thing is ended, I'll be able ter satisfy you thet I hain't no Tory."

"I am sure you are not a Tory, Lige," was the reply; "and I am much obliged to you for letting me know of the attack that is to be made."

"Thet's all right."

"There they come!" exclaimed a sharp-eyed "Liberty Boy" at this juncture, and all craned their necks and looked down the road.

Sure enough, the head of the British column could be seen, a third of a mile away, down the road, where there was a bend, around which the redecoats were just coming.

CHAPTER X.

THE "LIBERTY BOYS" DRAG NET

"Careful, now," was the order that Dick sent along the line; "be sure to do as I have told you."

Closer and closer the redcoats came.

Dick was watching the enemy closely and sizing the force up.

"There are about one hundred and fifty men," he said to himself; "well, we will be able to thrash that many without much trouble, I think. Especially when we have the advantage of taking them by surprise."

Closer and closer came the British.

The head of the column was now even with the farther end of the line of "Liberty Boys."

On up the road the redcoats marched, and when at last the head of the British column was even with the other end of the line of the "Liberty Boys," Dick felt that it was time to act.

He fired a shot from his pistol, and right on the heels of the report was the terrible crash-roar! of a volley from the weapons of the youths.

The volley came as a surprise to the British.

They would not have been more surprised by a clap of thunder from a clear sky.

The volley did terrible execution, too.

The "Liberty Boys" were good shots, and the majority had taken careful aim before firing.

The result was that about one-third of the British force went down, dead and wounded.

This created great confusion in the British ranks.

They were at once thrown into disorder.

"Fire into the timber!" roared Captain Shannon; "give it to the rebels, men!"

The redcoats up with their muskets and fired a volley, but as the "Liberty Boys" were behind the trees, not one was hit.

Then the "Liberty Boys" fired two volleys from their pistols, the volleys being one right on the heels of the other.

Considerable execution was done this time, also, and the redcoats, completely demoralized, turned and fled back down the road. All did not escape, however.

The "Liberty Boys" dashed forth from the timber, and managed to cut off the retreat of perhaps a dozen of the enemy.

The redcoats decided that they would rather live, so they threw up their arms and surrendered to the enemy.

The fleeing redcoats did not stop, but were still running at the top of their speed when they reached the bend in the road, and they disappeared around the bend very quickly.

The arms of the twelve prisoners were bound together behind their backs, and then the "Liberty Boys" turned their attention to the dead and wounded British.

It was found that thirty-two redcoats were dead, and twenty-four were wounded. Of the latter, ten were severely wounded and fourteen were painfully but not seriously wounded.

"What are we going to do with the wounded men?" asked Bob Estabrook.

"I'll tell ye whut ter do with 'em, ef so ye are willin' ter hev me offer the suggestion," said Lank Lige.

"Go ahead; what is your suggestion, Lige?" asked Dick.

"Et's this: Theer's quite a good many Tory settlers aroun' heer; make them come and get their wounded redcoats an' take care of 'em."

"That is a good idea," said Dick.

"The very thing," declared Bob.

Then Dick sent three of the "Liberty Boys" to three houses not far distant, Lang Lige having said which houses were the homes of the Tories, and the settlers were told to come and get the wounded redcoats and take care of them.

"Bring spades and help bury the dead redcoats," the messengers added.

Half an hour later the three settlers appeared, with teams and wagons. They brought spades, and while some of the "Liberty Boys" were lifting the redcoats and placing them on the straw in the wagons, the rest were digging graves and burying the dead soldiers."

An hour of hard work completed the affair, and the farmers drove slowly to their homes. Each Tory settler had six wounded soldiers in his wagon. There were six more wounded redcoats, but their wounds were not serious, and Dick decided to hold them prisoners along with the twelve that were not wounded at all.

When the Tories had driven away, Dick turned his attention to the prisoners.

He looked them over in a speculative manner.

"I'd like to hold them prisoners," said Bob; "but I do not want to go back to Richmond yet awhile, and I do not know what to do with them if we stay in this part of the country."

Lank Lige touched Dick on the arm and motioned him to step aside with him.

The youth obeyed, and then Lige said:

"Ef I unnerstan' ye, whut ye would like to do is ter hold ther redcoats fer erwhile?"

"Yes; I could send them up to Richmond, but I do not want to take the time and trouble to do that just now."

"I unnerstan', an' whut ye want, now, is er safe place ter keep them till ye air ready ter go back ter Richmond."

"That is it exactly."

"Wall, I kin show ye just what ye are lookin' fer."

"You can?"

"Ye bet."

"Is it far from here?"

"Not so very fur."

"How many miles?"

"Oh, et's only about er mile and er half."

"No farther than that?"

"Noap."

"That is good. Are you sure it is a place where it would be safe to leave the prisoners under only a small guard?"

"Ye bet. It's the safest place ye ever heerd tell of."

"And you think the British won't find it?"

"I don' think they will."

"Very good; then you may guide us thither."

"I'll show ye the way as soon as ye air reddey."

"Very well. We will be ready in a few moments."

The youth went back to where the rest were, and told them to get ready to march with the prisoners; then he motioned to Lank Lige.

"Go ahead, Lige," he ordered.

The lanky hunter nodded and led the way across the road and into the timber.

The "Liberty Boys," with the prisoners in their midst, followed.

Lank Lige had to go slowly, as the party having the prisoners in charge could not walk very rapidly through the timber.

Onward they moved, at a moderate pace, and after half an hour of progress, every step seeming to take them deeper and deeper into the wilderness, they found themselves at the edge of a swamp.

"Well, this is something new to me," said Tom Farrell; "I have lived all my life near here, but this is the first time that I knew there was a swamp here."

The guide led the way in a semi-circle, along the edge of the swamp, and presently he came to a stop, and waited until the others came up with him.

"Heer is the path thet leads into ther swamp," he said; "et is erbout five feet wide, and ye'll hev ter string out er get mired in the mud."

"All right," said Dick, "but how far is it that we have to follow this path?"

"Bout er quarter of er mile."

"A quarter, eh?"

"Yas; then we come ter ther solid ground."

"Ah, an island?"

"Yas."

"How big an island?"

"Erbout a quarter uv er mile ercross."

"And is there any other way of reaching the island besides by way of this path?"

"Noap. Not unless we walk through ther mud—an' no livin' man can do thet."

"Good! Then this will afford us a capital place for keeping our prisoners."

"I guess et will; I don' think theer is ennybody in these parts whut knows of this place, 'xcept me—and ye fellers, uv course."

"That is splendid. It will enable us to keep the prisoners safely, and make it unnecessary that we should send them to Richmond."

"Yas; I think they'll be safe heer; thet is ter say, I don' think theer's enny danger thet their comrades will find an' resky 'em."

Lige now moved away, going slowly, for the pathway of solid earth was crooked, and it was necessary that those not familiar with the crooks should go slowly.

Ten minutes later all were on the island, however, and it was found to be covered with a growth of bushes and large trees.

Lige led the way to the center of the island, and here a goodly-sized log cabin was found.

"Thet's my home," said Lige with a grin.

"Ah! Then you live here then, Lige?" cried Dick.

"Yas, and et's a good place ter live, too. I hain't bothered much with visitors."

"I should suppose not."

"Dick and the "Liberty Boys" were greatly pleased with the place.

"Why can't we take up our quarters here, Dick, while we are down in this part of the country?" asked Bob.

"I was just thinking of that myself, Bob," was the reply; "it would be a good place for us."

"Yes; we would be safer here than anywhere else that I know of, and if we got hard pushed at any time we could retire to our hiding-place and bid defiance to all the redcoats that could be brought against us."

"So we could. I'll speak to Lige about it."

The youth did so, and Lige said he would be glad to have the "Liberty Boys" make the island their headquarters.

"Stay heer, uv course, ef ye wanter," he said. "I think ye'd hev er hard time findin' er better place."

"I think so myself, Lige."

"Yes. Ef ye hed ter, ye c'u'd stan' er siege heer. Theer is er spring thet affords all ther water ye c'u'd use, an' I hev er lot uv grub stored heer—enuff ter las' yer hull crowd two er three weeks."

"That is splendid," said Dick; and he went back and told Bob what Lige had said.

"Good!" cried Bob. "We'll camp down here, and go out every once in awhile and rake in some redcoats, Dick."

"Yes, that's a good scheme, Bob; we'll do that very thing."

"Yes; it'll be like having a drag-net, and hauling the redcoats in."

"So it will, and we have captured eighteen redcoats at the very first haul made by our drag-net."

CHAPTER XI.

BEN SNAGGS AT WORK.

The "Liberty Boys" were delighted with their new quarters.

They felt secure on the island.

They felt that they could do about as they pleased, even though they were in reality in the enemy's country.

Having decided to make the island their headquarters, they left half a dozen of their number to guard the prisoners, and went to the home of Mr. Farrell, and brought their horses over onto the island.

Having secured a good place to stay, the "Liberty Boys" now began the work that they had come down there to do.

They were in the saddle every day for the next four or five days, and nearly all of every day, too.

They scoured the country in every direction, and kept a sharp lookout for the redcoats.

They struck several parties of British hard blows, and captured twenty prisoners and added them to the number already secured.

The British grew afraid to venture up in that part of the country in parties of less than two hundred, and one or two parties of that size were struck hard blows by the "Liberty Boys."

Arnold was wild with rage.

He knew that the party of horsemen who were making things so lively for his men were "The Liberty Boys of '76," and he was eager to strike them a blow.

He knew it would be difficult, however, for he was well acquainted with Dick Slater, and knew the youth was daring and shrewd, as well as cool-headed and cautious.

What puzzled Arnold, however, was the fact that it seemed impossible to learn where the youths had their headquarters.

He had sent out scouts and spies, but not one seemed able to learn where the "Liberty Boys' " headquarters were.

He offered a reward of ten pounds to the man who would discover the hiding-place of the "Liberty Boys," and the scouts and spies redoubled their efforts, but to no avail.

They could not find out where the youths stayed, when they were not dashing about the country, making it warm for their enemies.

Ben Snaggs happened to visit Petersburg one day, and he heard some one say that there was a reward of ten pounds offered for information regarding the headquarters occupied by the "Liberty Boys."

He at once went to the house occupied by Arnold, and asked to see the commander.

He was shown into Arnold's presence.

"Well, young man, what can I do for you?" Arnold asked.

"Is et so thet ye offer ten poun's ter ther feller what'll tell ye where ther 'Liberty Boys' stay?" asked Ben.

Arnold started.

"Yes, it is true," he replied. "Do you know where they have their headquarters?"

Ben shook his head.

"No, I don't know," he replied.

"Then what do you want here?" in a voice which betrayed disappointment.

"I wanted ter fin' out whether er not et wuz so thet ye hed offered ther munny."

"Yes, it's true; but if you don't know where they are, the knowledge won't do you any good."

"Yes, et will."

"How?"

"I'm goin' ter fin' out where ther 'Liberty Boys' stay, an' then I'll come an' tell ye an' git ther munny."

Arnold's face lighted up.

"So that is your plan, is it?" he remarked.

"Ye bet et is!"

"What is your name?"

"Ben Snaggs."

"Where do you live?"

"I live up not fur frum where ther 'Liberty Boys' seem ter be mos' uv ther time."

"And do you think you can find out where they stay?"

"I think so."

"I hope you may do so."

"I'm goin' ter try, ye bet."

"That is right; and if you do find out where they stay, come to me with the information, and I will hand you over the ten pounds promptly."

"All right; I'll do et."

Then Ben took his departure, feeling in good spirits, for he felt confident he could discover where the "Liberty Boys" kept themselves when not on the road, chasing redcoats.

"I'll fin' out where ther hidin'-place is, er know ther reason w'y!" he said to himself. "I'll jest wait till ther 'Liberty Boys' come out onter ther road erg'in, an' then I'll try ter keep track uv 'em, foller 'em when they goes back ter ther stoppin'-place at night."

Ben was so full of the subject that he told his parents all about what he was going to do, just as soon as he got home. They thought it was a good plan if Ben could make a success of it.

"Ten poun's is lots uv munny, these times," said Mr. Snaggs; "but I'm erfeerd ye'll hev er hard time trackin' ther 'Liberty Boys' ter ther hidin'-place, Ben."

"Oh, I'll do et, all right, dad," said Ben, confidently. "I want thet munny, an' then, ye know, we owe Dick Slater sumthin' fur interferin' with us ther time we wuz givin' Tom Farrell er lickin'."

"That's right, Ben; I shall be glad ter git even with thet feller."

"But ye hed better be keerful, Ben," said Mrs. Snaggs. "Them 'Liberty Boys' air mighty smart fellers, an' ef they's ter git holt uv ye, they'd likely shoot ye."

"Thet's what they would," nodded Mr. Snaggs.

"But I won't let 'em ketch me," said Ben, confidently.

"Say, Ben, I've allers notussed thet ther 'Liberty Boys' go inter ther timber, down ther road, yender, at the same place, ev'ry time; hev ye notussed et?"

"Yas, dad."

"Waal, I think thet ef ye'll hide clust ter thet place, in the evenin', ye'll be all reddy when ther 'Liberty Boys' come erlong, an'll be able fur ter foller 'em."

"Thet's jest what I'm goin' ter do, dad."

Mr. Snaggs had some business over at the Hopper home that evening, and he told Mr. Hopper what Ben was figuring on doing.

"He seen Arnold, down ter Petersburg, ter-day," said Snaggs, "an' Arnold tole 'im thet ef he'd fin' out where ther 'Liberty Boys' stays, and let 'im know, he'd pay ther ten poun's promp'ly; an' Ben's goin' ter try ter earn ther munny."

"It'll be rather a hard thing to do, though, don't you think?" asked Mr. Hopper.

"Ter foller ther 'Liberty Boys,' ye mean?"

"Yes."

"Waal, I think et will, but I guess Ben kin do et."

"How is he going to go about it?"

"Waal, we've nottussed thet ther 'Liberty Boys' allers goes inter ther timber at ther same place, up ther road, erbout halfway atween heer an' my house, and Ben is goin' ter hide clust ter thet place, an' when they come erlong he'll foller 'em, an' see where they go."

"Ah, that is the scheme, eh?"

"Yas."

"Well, Ben may be successful, but I wouldn't wager too much on it."

"I think he'll be able ter do et."

"Ah, yonder goes Ben now," said Mr. Hopper. "He has just entered the timber at the spot you spoke of, where the 'Liberty Boys' always enter it."

"Yas, an'—look, Sam! yender comes ther ban' uv 'Liberty Boys' this very minnet!"

The other looked and nodded his head.

"Yes, there are the 'Liberty Boys,' sure enough," he agreed. "Well, Ben will now have the chance to try his plan."

"Yer right; waal, good artemnoon, neighbor Hopper."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Snaggs."

Then Jim Snaggs took his departure, and returned to his home by way of a short cut through the timber.

Mr. Hopper went into the house, and as he disappeared a girl stepped out from behind the corner of the house.

The girl was Lucy Hopper, and she had heard the conversation between her father and Mr. Snaggs. Happening to be near there by accident, she had overheard the dialogue between Hopper and Snaggs.

"So Ben Snaggs is going to follow the 'Liberty Boys' to their hiding-place, and then go and tell Arnold where the hiding-place is, is he?" she murmured. "Well, I will see about that. My sweetheart, Tom Farrell, is a member of the band of 'Liberty Boys,' and I am not going to let Ben Snaggs get him into trouble—not if I can help myself."

The beautiful girl hesitated.

She seemed undecided as to her course.

She glanced down the road, and saw that the "Liberty Boys" were almost to the point where they always entered the timber, and knowing she could not reach them in time to warn them, she made up her mind to another course.

Making her way out of the yard, she crossed the road, and entering the timber, made her way as rapidly as she could in the direction of the place where the "Liberty Boys" would enter the forest.

Ben Snaggs was in hiding nearby when the "Liberty Boys" turned aside from the road and entered the timber.

He saw that the youths had five redcoats in their midst, and a black look appeared on his face.

"So ye've got some more uv ther British prisoners, hev

ye, Dick Slater?" he muttered. "Waal, if I hev good luck, I'll fix et so Arnold will be able ter free all ther prisoners an' will be able ter git ye ez prisoners in his han's."

The "Liberty Boys," not thinking of such a thing as that there was a spy at hand, rode through the timber, going in the direction of the island in the swamp.

They were in a good humor, for they had routed a party of redcoats, capturing five, and had foiled the British in an attempt at burning the home of a patriot.

The youths were talking and laughing, and this made Ben madder than ever.

"Oh, yas, tork an' laff all ye wanter," he muttered. "I think Arnold'll make ye laff outer ther other side uv yer mouth afore much longer."

He followed, stealthily, and was easily able to do so, as the "Liberty Boys" could not go very fast on horseback through the timber.

"I'll be able ter track 'em down, easy enuff," thought Ben, with a feeling of satisfaction. "I'll track 'em ter their hidin'-place, an' then I'll hurry back an' go ter Petersburg an' tell Arnold. Then I'll git ther munny, an' he'll bring er lot uv men an' capter ther 'Liberty Boys.' Thet'll giv me er good revenge onter Dick Slater fur interferin' thet artemnoon w'en me'n dad wuz thrashin' Tom Farrell."

Ben kept as close behind the party as he dared, and did not lose sight of them.

When at last they reached the point where the path entered the swamp, the horsemen stretched out, and rode in single file, and this occasioned quite a wait, during which time Ben watched proceedings with wondering eyes.

"Waal, this beats ennythin'!" he muttered. "Thet is er swamp, ez sure ez guns, an' their's er path what goes ercross ter some solid groun'. I knowed ther wuz swamps in Virginny, but I didn' know ther wuz one so clust ter home."

At last all the "Liberty Boys" were riding along the winding pathway, and Ben uttered an exclamation of delight.

"I've run ther 'Liberty Boys' ter their hidin'-place," he exclaimed. "I see smoke out their er ways, an' thet's where they are stayin'. Likely et's an islan'. Ben Snaggs, ye air in luck. Now ter go back home, an' then ter git ter Petersburg an' tell Arnold an' git ther ten poun's."

"Ben Snaggs, you will not go to Petersburg, nor will you ever handle that ten pounds of British gold," spoke a clear, ringing voice, and the Tory youth whirled—to find himself confronted by Lucy Hopper. What was more, the beautiful girl held a cocked pistol in her hand, and it was leveled full at Ben's head.

CHAPTER XII.

A BRAVE GIRL.

The Tory youth's underjaw dropped.

He stared at the girl in open-mouthed amazement.

Never was a person taken more by surprise.

His attention had been on the "Liberty Boys," and he had not given any thought to anything else. He had never for a moment thought of such a thing as that while he was following the "Liberty Boys" some one might be following him.

To tell the truth, Ben was frightened, and as he gazed into the muzzle of the pistol he turned pale.

He tried to keep the girl from seeing that he was frightened, however, but was not wholly successful.

"Lucy Hopper!" Ben finally gasped.

"Yes, Lucy Hopper," was the quiet reply.

"What d'ye mean, Lucy, by p'intin' thet pistol at me?" asked Ben. "Turn et in some other direckshun; et mought go off."

"It will go off if you attempt to make a move before I give you permission, Ben Snaggs," was the determined reply.

"What d'ye mean, Lucy? What hev ye done this fur?"

"You know very well, Ben Snaggs."

"No I don'."

"I say you do. I know all about this affair, Ben. I heard your father tell mine that you were going to watch for the 'Liberty Boys,' follow them, find out where their hiding-place is, and then go to Petersburg and tell Arnold; and I made up my mind to foil your scheme."

"Ye mus' be crazy, Lucy," said Ben. "Ye're er Tory's gal, an' orter be glad to help ther British ter git ther best uv ther rebels."

"I'm the daughter of a Tory, true; but I'm not a Tory myself, Ben Snaggs."

"Ye hain't?"

"No."

A sudden, angry light came into Ben's eyes.

"An' I know ther reason w'y ye hain't er Tory, Lucy Hopper," he cried. "Et's becoss Tom Farrell is er rebel, an' ye are in love with 'im."

A vivid flush swept over the girl's face.

"That is none of your business, one way or another, Ben Snaggs," she said with dignity. "I am not a Tory, and that is enough. And I am not going to let you go to Petersburg and tell Arnold where the 'Liberty Boys' stay, either."

"Ye hain't?"

"No."

"How are ye goin' ter he'p yerself?"

"I will show you. Turn your face in the other direction, Ben Snaggs."

"What fur?"

"Because I tell you to."

"Oh, but ye kain't expeck me ter do what ye say, Lucy Hopper."

"I do expect you to do what I tell you."

"But I won' do et."

"You must do it!"

"I won't."

"You had better!" The girl's voice was grim and determined, and so was the look on her face.

"What'll ye do, ef I don' do what ye tell me ter?" asked Ben.

"What will I do?"

"Yas."

"I'll shoot you." The girl's voice rang out clearly, and Ben began to think she would do what she said.

"Ye wouldn' dar' shoot me," he growled.

"But I would, though. And I will, too, if you don't obey me."

"Thet would be murder ef ye wuz ter shoot me."

"No, not in war times. It would be doing right, because forced to the act in order to save the patriots from capture and perhaps death."

Ben turned paler still.

He began to feel that he was in a tight place.

"An' ye say ye'll shoot me ef I don' do what ye say, Lucy Hopper?" he asked.

"I will shoot you, as sure as you stand there, Ben Snaggs, unless you do what I say, and now I tell you once more, and for the last time; to turn your face in the other direction."

"What d'ye want me ter do thet fur?" asked Ben.

"That is my business. Do as I tell you."

"Ye wanter shoot me in ther back when I ain't lookin'!" said Ben suspiciously.

"Bah! if I wished to shoot you I would do so, and would not take the trouble to make you turn your back to me."

"Ye may be afeerd ye couldn' hit me at ther distance ye air erway, an' ef I turn my back ye kin step clust up ter me an' put er bullet right through my head."

"I could hit you from here if I wished. I have practiced lots with this pistol, and am a dead shot."

"Is—thet—so?"

"It is; now turn your back toward me."

Ben hesitated, and then, noticing a threatening look come over the girl's face, he decided to obey, and proceeded to turn his back to the girl.

He kept his head twisted around, so that he could keep an eye on the girl, however, and a look of scorn and contempt came over Lucy's face.

"You coward," she exclaimed. "I believe you would shoot a person in the back if you got a chance and did not like the person. You wouldn't be so suspicious if that were not the case."

"I'm afraid ther pistol mought go off when ye ain't thinkin', Lucy," was the reply.

"And I suppose you think that by having your eyes on me you would be enabled to dodge the bullet?" was the scornful retort.

"No, not exackly, but——"

"Forward, march!" interrupted the girl.

Ben did not move.

"Did you hear me?" the girl cried. "I said for you to forward march."

"Where shall I march ter?" asked Ben doggedly.

"Along the pathway over which the 'Liberty Boys' have just gone."

Ben started.

"Shorely ye hain't ergoin' ter make me——" began Ben, but again the girl interrupted, with

"You are going to do just what I tell you. Now march right along that path, and if you stop after you have started, or try to play any trick on me, I will shoot you dead, Ben Snaggs. Be very careful, now, and make no mistake, for I mean every word I say. I have made up my mind that you shall not betray the hiding-place of the 'Liberty Boys,' and you shall not, even if I have to kill you to keep you from doing so."

Ben became convinced, at last, that the girl meant every word she uttered, and so he moved forward. He walked slowly, however, and there was a sullen, almost desperate look on his face.

They were on the pathway of solid earth, and so he had no opportunity of making a sudden bolt for freedom. To leap to either side would be to land in the oozy, sticky mud, where he would be held fast, as if clutched in the grasp of a giant.

The "Liberty Boys" were in good spirits, and when they reached the island, and drew up in front of the log cabin, they greeted their five or six comrades who had remained to keep guard over the prisoners pleasantly.

"We have brought some more prisoners for you," called out Dick cheerfully.

"That's all right," said Mark Morrison, who was one of those who had remained to guard the prisoners, "but I'm going with you on the road next time, and somebody else has got to take a turn at watching the prisoners."

"And that's what I say, too," said another of the youths and the other three or four said the same.

"Certainly; that's only right, boys," said Dick, smiling. "We will take turns at watching the prisoners."

"This makes forty-three redcoats that we have prisoners here, Dick," said Bob Estabrook. "That's doing pretty well, isn't it."

"Yes, indeed. Our drag-net seems to be working to good advantage."

"Yes, and if we keep on hauling the redcoats in we will weaken Arnold's force materially after awhile."

"I'd like to keep it up till we had captured the majority of his force," said Dick, smiling.

"That's right. That would be great, Dick."

The five prisoners were helped down off the horses' backs, and placed with their comrades, and then the "Liberty Boys" proceeded to unbridle and unsaddle their horses.

"How have the prisoners been acting this afternoon, Mark?" asked Dick when the horses had been taken care of, and he had returned to the cabin.

"They have been quiet, Dick."

"They might as well be."

"Yes. Oh, some of them have talked in a threatening manner, and told what Arnold will do to us when he gets

his hands on us, but of course that is to be expected, and such talk does not amount to anything."

"Of course not."

"How big a party of redcoats did you run up against this afternoon, Dick?"

"There were fifty or sixty of them."

"And did you kill any of them?"

"About a dozen."

"That is good. I guess the redcoats will begin to think we are a dangerous lot of chaps, pretty soon."

"Quite likely."

"I'll warrant you that Arnold would give a goodly sum to know where we stay, Dick."

"No doubt of that, Mark."

"He would like to get at us."

"Yes; but I don't think he can learn where our headquarters are."

"I don't think so, either."

"And even if he were to do so, we could put up a good fight against his entire force."

"Yes; they would have to come almost in single file, owing to the narrowness of the path leading to the island, and we could pick them off as we pleased."

"That's right, and—Great Scott! look yonder, Dick! Who are the two, anyway?"

The exclamation called the attention of all the "Liberty Boys" to the thing that had attracted Mark's attention, and they saw two persons coming toward the cabin, one a boy, the other a girl.

"Great Guns! it's Lucy!" exclaimed Tom Farrell, his eyes almost popping out in amazement at the sight of his sweetheart.

"And yes—as sure as fate, that young fellow in front of her is Ben Snaggs, the Tory," he added, excitedly.

"And she's making Ben Snaggs walk right along at the muzzle of a pistol," cried Bob in excitement. "Say, Tom, your sweetheart is a girl worth having."

CHAPTER XIII.

NETTIE GRAVES BRINGS INFORMATION.

It was certainly a peculiar and interesting sight to see the girl marching Ben Snaggs along.

Ben looked sheepish, to say the least, and he had a frightened appearance as well.

It could be seen as they drew nearer that his face was very pale.

When they were at the point where the "Liberty Boys" stood, the girl ordered Ben to halt, and then turning toward Dick she said, indicating Ben:

"I have brought you a prisoner, Mr. Slater."

"So I see," he replied, with a smile. "How does it happen, Miss Hopper?"

"I will tell you. He was spying on you, had followed

you to the edge of the swamp, and as I happened to know he intended to go to Arnold at Petersburg and tell him where you "Liberty Boys" are staying, I decided to put a stop to his scheme."

"How did you know he was going to do this?"

"I heard his father tell mine that Ben was going to follow you, see where you went, and carry the information to Arnold, and so I followed him, and when he was about to turn and go away, after tracking you to this place, I stepped out, pistol in hand, and forced him to march here, instead."

"You are the bravest girl I ever saw in my life, Miss Hopper," said Dick. "Give her three cheers, boys."

Instantly every hat was off, and as the youths gave utterance to the three cheers, they swung the hats around their heads.

It was a splendid tribute to the brave girl, and she appreciated it, for her eyes sparkled and her face took on added color.

"And now, Ben Snaggs," said Dick, when the cheering was ended, "what have you to say for yourself?"

"Nothin'," was the sullen reply.

"Nothin, eh?"

"Thet's what I said."

"So you were going to tell Arnold where we are staying, were you?"

"I wuz; an' I would hev done et, too, but fur Lucy Hopper."

"Exactly, and we owe you a debt of gratitude for saving us from being attacked by a large force of British, Miss Lucy. We thank you sincerely."

"You are more than welcome, Mr. Slater. I was glad to do it, because—because——"

"Because Tom, here, is a member of my company, eh, Miss Lucy?" smiled Dick, slapping Tom on the back. Then, as he saw a blush suffuse the girl's face, and she looked confused, he added:

"That is all right, Miss Lucy. There are many among us who have sweethearts, and we are glad to know that Tom, here, has such a brave girl for a sweetheart. We are proud of you, for his sake and your own, both."

Then Dick turned his attention again to Ben Snaggs.

"Make a prisoner of him, boys," said Dick, indicating the Tory youth, and a couple of the "Liberty Boys" quickly tied Ben's arms together, behind his back.

"What ye goin' ter do with me?" asked Ben, his face growing ashen, for now he realized that he was in a predicament, sure enough. He was a prisoner, and he thought it possible he might never live to return to his home. Being of a cowardly disposition, his fears were augmented by the danger.

"We are going to hold you a prisoner for awhile, Ben, my boy," replied Dick.

"And we may take it into our heads to string you up to a limb, to see how you will look," said Bob Estabrook, with a sober face.

"Oh, say, ye wouldn' do thet!" cried Ben aghast. "Ye wouldn' dar'."

"Oh, yes, we would dare do it," said Mark Morrison. "This is war time, you know, and we can do about as we please. Whether or not we hang you depends on how you act, and on how we feel about the matter."

Ben was badly scared, and his knees shook.

"Say, please let me go home," he said to Dick. "I prummus ye thet I won't go ter Arnold with ther news erbout yer hidin'-place. I won't do nothin' ye wouldn' want me ter. I'll turn patriot, ef ye'll on'y let me go."

"I would not trust you, Ben Snaggs," said Dick sternly. "I think you would keep your promises just about long enough to enable you to get to your home, and then you would lose no time in getting to Arnold with the information."

"Ye are mistook, Mr. Slater. I wouldn' do nothin' like thet."

"We'll make sure of it by keeping you here," said Dick. "Take him and place him with the other prisoners, boys."

And Ben was led away.

Tom Farrell asked permission of Dick to accompany Lucy home, which permission was of course promptly granted, and the lovers set out, after Lucy had been thanked again for what she had done for them.

"Jove, but I almost envy Tom," said Bob, gazing after Tom and Lucy as they walked away. "Isn't that one of the bravest, sweetest, and most beautiful girls you ever saw, Dick?"

"Yes, she is all you have said, Bob," was the reply. "But if I should write home and tell Sister Edith how you are talking, I guess she would pull out some of your hair the next time she sees you."

"But you won't tell her," grinned Bob. "If you were to do so I'd tell Sister Alice you made love to most all the pretty girls we met while traveling around the country, and I guess you would lose some of your own wool when she next laid eyes on you."

Whereat both laughed, for there were never two more true-hearted youths, and there was not the least danger that the pretty faces of any girls would cause them to forget their sweethearts, Alice Estabrook and Edith Slater.

The "Liberty Boys" went ahead with the work they were engaged upon for two or three weeks longer, and Arnold was rendered nearly wild with rage as party after party of his men were struck severe blows by the dashing "Liberty Boys."

It became his one aim to run the youths to earth and capture them, and he made herculean efforts to do so, but always failed.

He began to think that his force was doomed to be gradually cut down and captured, until there would be nothing left of it—and as he realized that this was the work of one hundred youths scarcely more than out of their teens, his anger was something fearful.

About the first week in May, however, he heard good news.

A messenger came, bringing the intelligence that Cornwallis was coming up into Virginia with his army, and that he would soon reach Petersburg.

"Good!" exclaimed Arnold. "Then he will march against Richmond, and that will put a stop to the work of the 'Liberty Boys' down in this part of the country. Lafayette will have to retire from Richmond, and Dick Slater and his gang will have to follow him or be captured."

It was the 20th of May when Cornwallis and his army reached Petersburg, however, the march having been a tedious one, and swollen streams and missing bridges having retarded its advance.

Cornwallis held an interview with Arnold at once, and asked for information as to the lay of the land.

Arnold gave the British general all the information in his power, and Cornwallis felt sure he would be able to advance to Richmond and give Lafayette a good thrashing.

He was angered, however, when told of the work the "Liberty Boys" had been doing in the vicinity of Petersburg, and said that it was a shame that a party of one hundred "beardless boys," as called the youths, should be permitted to go on with their work of capturing and killing British soldiers for weeks without being brought up with a round turn.

"I have done the best that I could," said Arnold, with some haughtiness. "I assure you, General Cornwallis, that, beardless boys though they may be, the 'Liberty Boys' are very daring and dangerous customers, and you will find this out to your cost if you give them a chance at any small parties of your men."

"Bah! I will exterminate the band if they come within my reach," was the arrogant reply.

It happened that Mr. Graves and his daughter Nettie were in Petersburg on the day the British army reached there, and they made haste to get out of the town and away, for they realized that they were in danger if they remained, and then, too, they knew that it was important that Dick Slater and his "Liberty Boys" be informed of the coming of Cornwallis and his army.

So they left the town, and drove home as fast as their horses could go, and then Nettie set out for the camp of the "Liberty Boys" on the island in the swamp.

She had been there two or three times with her brother Frank, and knew the way well.

Half an hour's walk took her to her destination, and when she arrived there she was greeted pleasantly by all, for Frank was a favorite among his comrades, and one of the "Liberty Boys,"—George Davis by name—had fallen in love with Nettie, and she with him, and it was characteristic of the youths that a sweetheart of one of their number was looked upon as a very queen among girls. In the generous, impulsive hearts of the "Liberty Boys" there was no room for petty jealousies, and they were always glad when one of their number was enjoying the companionship of a sweetheart.

So now, when Nettie put in an appearance in the encampment, they hastened to call George Davis, who was

standing guard over the prisoners, one of the other youths taking his place.

When George and Nettie had exchanged greetings the girl turned to Dick and said:

"I have news for you, Mr. Slater."

"What is the news, Miss Nettie?" the youth asked.

"Cornwallis and his army have arrived at Petersburg."

The "Liberty Boys" gave utterance to exclamations.

"Say you so, Miss Nettie?" exclaimed Dick.

"Yes; father and I were in Petersburg this forenoon, when the British army arrived there."

"Ah! And has he a large army with him, Miss Nettie?"

"I think he must have brought an army of nearly four thousand men, Mr. Slater."

"And with the thousand already there, under Arnold, he now has an army of at least five thousand," said Dick.

"Yes, and Lafayette has only three thousand, Dick," said Bob Estabrook.

"You are right, and two-thirds of the men under him are raw militia. He will be unable to hold Richmond, Bob."

"That's right; and if Lafayette has to retreat from Richmond it will be necessary for us to get out of this part of the country, don't you think?"

"Yes, indeed; if we remained we would most certainly be captured sooner or later."

"Well, what will you do, Dick?"

The youth was silent a few minutes, pondering the situation, and presently he said:

"I will tell you what we will do, boys. We will retreat to Richmond with our prisoners, at once."

"Well, that is one place where we have the better of Arnold, Dick," said Bob. "We have nearly one hundred of his men prisoners, and he has not one of our men."

"True, Bob. Our drag-net has been at work while we have been here, and we have hauled a goodly number of redcoats in."

"So we have."

CHAPTER XIV.

ANOTHER HAUL.

Having made up his mind what they should do, Dick acted promptly.

The "Liberty Boys" retired to Richmond with their prisoners, and when they reached there there was great excitement, caused by the fact that the youths had succeeded in capturing so many redcoats and by the news that Cornwallis and his army were at Petersburg and would soon advance upon Richmond.

Dick went at once to headquarters and was closeted with Lafayette.

"What do you think about this matter, Dick?" asked the young general. "Is there any chance that we could hold Richmond?"

"Let me see; how many men have you, General Lafayette?"

"Three thousand."

"And a large number of them are militia?"

"Yes."

"While Cornwallis has at least five thousand soldiers, and all of them trained and experienced veterans. I will leave the answer to your question to your own judgment, sir."

Lafayette was silent for a few moments and then he shook his head.

"It is an impossibility," he said. "We cannot hold Richmond."

"So I think, general."

"No, it would be folly to attempt it. The only thing is to get ready to retire as soon as the British put in an appearance."

"You are right, sir."

"When do you think Cornwallis will advance upon Richmond?"

"Likely within a day or two."

"Then we must work rapidly."

"Yes; it won't do to lose any time."

"No, indeed."

Lafayette at once sent out word for his men to begin making preparations to retreat from Richmond.

The men lost no time in getting to work and within ten hours they were ready to march at the command.

"Now let Cornwallis come as soon as he likes," said Lafayette, when he was informed of the fact that all preparations for the retreat were completed; "I don't think he will find much here to repay him for the trouble of coming."

Cornwallis did not seem to be in any great hurry about coming, however. A whole week passed and he had not put in an appearance.

Feeling that he might as well hold his ground until he was forced to vacate, Lafayette remained quietly in Richmond. Fearing there might be a threat in the action or non-action of his enemy, the young general kept scouts and spies out constantly, Dick and his "Liberty Boys" coming in for a large share of this work.

Nearly another week passed before there were any signs to be seen of the British, and then Dick Slater rode into Richmond on a gallop, and hastened to inform Lafayette of the fact that the British were coming.

Instantly Lafayette sent out the order to get ready to retreat, and there was great bustle and confusion for a time, but soon all was straightened out and the Patriot army marched out of Richmond.

In the midst of the Patriot force were the one hundred prisoners that had been captured by Dick Slater and his "Liberty Boys."

"We'll hold them and then if the British should succeed in capturing any of our men at any time, we should be able to get them back by exchanging," said Lafayette.

Dick Slater had asked the general for permission to remain in Richmond until the coming of the British, and the

permission had been granted, though Lafayette cautioned Dick not to let any of his men be captured.

"I need you and all your brave boys," he said.

"We will be careful," said Dick.

So the "Liberty Boys" remained behind when the main force marched out of Richmond.

"What are you going to try to do, Dick?" asked Bob.

"I wish to try to capture a few more redecoats, Bob," was the reply; "I would like to capture some of Cornwallis' men."

"You want to bring our drag-net into play once more, eh?"

"Yes, I would like to make one more haul just to show Cornwallis that he cannot have everything his own way, even if we have retreated from Richmond and left him to take possession."

"Well, I think that we can do it, old man."

"We will try it at any rate."

"You are right."

"If the British are strung out, Bob, and the advance guard is not too strong, we may be able to make some captures and get safely away before the main force gets here."

"True."

The "Liberty Boys" made their arrangements with infinite care. Their horses, ready bridled and saddled, were close at hand, and there were twenty extra animals, for use in case the youths succeeded in making any captures.

They did not have long to wait, for a "Liberty Boy" who was stationed in the belfry of a church near where the youths were stationed presently gave the information that the advance guard of the British force were entering the city.

"How strong is the advance guard?" asked Dick.

"Oh, I should say one hundred strong," came the reply; "but they are strung out, and I think that we can gather in fifteen or twenty of them and get away easily enough."

Sam Sanderson, disguised in an old suit of citizen's clothes, was to act the part of a decoy, and he at once set out to meet the advance guard of the British.

When he met the officer riding at their head, he told the fellow that if he would hasten forward with a score of his men, he would be able to capture some rebels who were in the rear yard of a place that had been occupied by them as quarters.

"They're bridlin' an' saddlin' their horses," said Sam, "an' ye kin ketch 'em, ef ye hurry."

The officer dashed forward, followed by his men, whose horses were not equal in speed, and who became strung out as a consequence. As fast as they arrived at a point where Sam was standing—which point was an alley leading to the rear of a house—the redecoats, at his suggestion, leaped off their horses and dashed through the gateway.

One after another the redecoats entered the alley, and as they did so they were seized by the "Liberty Boys" and bound and gagged.

When twenty had been secured, they were placed on

the extra horses, and then the "Liberty Boys" mounted in hot haste, and the entire party dashed away just as the main part of the advance guard appeared on the scene.

When the "Liberty Boys" overtook the main force of the Patriots and General Lafayette saw that the youths had captured a number of the redcoats, his surprise was great.

"It was simple enough, sir," said Dick, and then he told how it had been done.

General Lafayette was loud in his praises of Dick and his "Liberty Boys."

"You are wonders," he said. "If I had an army the size of the one I have, and all were men like you boys, I would return to Richmond and drive Cornwallis out of the state."

Dick laughed.

The prisoners listened to the conversation with sullen looks on their faces. The way they looked at Dick and his comrades showed that they would have liked to have had a chance to get even with the youths.

"Do you suppose Cornwallis will follow us?" asked Lafayette, after the subject of the capture of the redcoats had been exhausted.

"I think it likely, sir," replied Dick.

"In that case we will have to keep on retreating."

"Yes, unless you should come to a place where you could station your army in what you considered an impregnable position."

"True. I will keep a lookout for some such place."

That evening the Patriot army went into camp just across a stream, in the midst of heavy timber, and as soon as supper had been eaten Dick mounted his horse and galloped back down the road in the direction from which they had come.

"I will find out whether or not the British are following us," he told General Lafayette, and this was the errand that he was bent upon.

He rode at a gallop a distance of two miles, and then he slackened his speed to a walk, and even occasionally paused, and during the pauses he leaned forward in his saddle and listened intently.

"When he had gone another mile he paused and listened for a period of five minutes at least. Hearing nothing, he dismounted, and climbing a tall tree standing beside the road, looked toward the south.

At a point less than a mile distant, as nearly as he could judge, he saw the reflection from the campfires.

"There they are," he said to himself; "yes, Cornwallis has followed us. But I will investigate and make sure of the matter, and learn, if possible, how many men have come in pursuit of us."

The "Liberty Boy" climbed to the ground, mounted, and rode half a mile further, and then dismounting, he crept forward, and after spending an hour in reconnoitering, succeeded in becoming possessed of all the information necessary to a full understanding of the situation.

"Cornwallis and his entire army are after us," said Dick

to himself. "I will now hasten back to camp and let Lafayette know what I have learned."

The youth was soon back to where his horse stood, and mounting, he rode back to the Patriot encampment.

"They are after us in full force, general," he told Lafayette, and the general called his officers together and held a council.

It was decided to keep on retreating swiftly, and to this end the army was afoot long before daylight the next morning, and had marched several miles before the British force was in action.

Cornwallis' scouts speedily informed him that the enemy had stolen a march on him, and he was very angry, and pushed forward in pursuit of the Patriots with renewed vigor.

The Patriots were good at marching, however, and held their own admirably, the British gaining very little, if any.

That night Cornwallis tried to make an extra march and catch the Patriot army, but thanks to the scouting "Liberty Boys," who were out under Dick's directions, on the lookout for this very thing, the movement was detected in time, and the Patriots broke camp, and by marching steadily for several hours, managed to place about the same distance between them and their pursuers as had existed before.

The British, disappointed and disgusted by their failure to catch the enemy napping, went into camp in the abandoned Patriot encampment.

Cornwallis kept up the chase until the 4th of June, when, Lafayette's force having crossed the Rapidan river and taken up a strong position just beyond, he gave up the chase and turned back toward Richmond.

Thus ends the story of "The Liberty Boys' Drag-Net."

They had certainly done good work for the great cause, and the redcoats that had been hauled in in such a skilful manner were used for exchange purposes later on, one hundred and twenty Patriot prisoners in the hands of the British being returned to the Patriot army in exchange for one hundred and twenty redcoats Dick had gathered in his drag-net on the island near the swamp.

THE END.

The next number (102) of "The Liberty Boys of '76" will contain "THE LIBERTY BOYS' LIGHTNING WORK; or, TOO FAST FOR THE BRITISH," by Harry Moore.

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